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# NARKA, THE NIHILIST

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# NARKA, THE NIHILIST.

## CHAPTER I.

It was All-souls Eve. The winter was setting in early, and threatened, or perhaps we should say promised, to be a severe one; for a hard winter was not looked upon as a misfortune at Yrakow, the ancestral home of Prince Zorokoff. Ice and snow brought too many pleasures in their train ever to be unwelcome there.

A group consisting of young Prince Basil Zorokoff, his brother-in-law, M. de Beaucrillon, and three ladies were assembled in an old-fashioned tapestried room of the castle. The two men were smoking cigarettes, and discussing sport between long-drawn puffs. The three ladies were sitting round the samovar. They presented three as distinct types as could have been brought together with a view to the setting off of each by contrast.

Sibyl, Comtesse de Beaucrillon, the daughter of the house, was as blond as a Scandinavian, with light blue eyes and fair hair; her hands were so small as to be almost out of proportion with her figure, which was tall and full; they were round and dimpled like a baby's, with the delicate nails and pink finger-tips that one seldom sees in perfection except in babies. Her movements had the subtle fascinating grace that reminded you of a kitten, or rather of a young cat, for there was nothing of the undignified friskiness of a kitten about

Sibyl. She was patrician to the tips of her fingers. Her manners united the refined elegance of a French woman with the soft serpentine grace of the women of the north.

Marguerite de Beaucrillon was just below the middle height, but she looked tiny beside her stately sister-in-law. She had no pretensions to beauty, yet her face was pleasanter to look at than many a beautiful one; her clear olive skin, her warm color, her wistful bright brown eyes, her dimples, and her glossy hair were suggestive of youth, health, and happiness, and these natural advantages were set off by the most becoming toilets; for Marguerite had a French girl's taste and principles about dress, and considered it seriously as one of the daily duties of life. She was careful and very successful in her combination of colors and effects. Yet you would never have accused her of coquetry in the ordinary sense. If you had been so uncharitable, one glance into her face would have converted you. Her eyes were as free from consciousness as a child's, and their language was as transparent. Sibyl used to say to her, "If you don't want people to see what you are thinking of, drop your lids, for those eyes of yours are like windows into your brain, and let one see your thoughts coming and going."

Narka Larik, the adopted sister of Madame de Beaucrillon, was the tallest of the three women, and cast in altogether an ampler mould. If her figure had been less perfectly proportioned, it might have seemed too large; her great luminous blue-black eyes, sometimes quite blue, sometimes quite black, were soft as velvet, but under the softness there lurked intimation of a fiery vitality ready to awake and emit sparks at the lightest touch; her mouth was perhaps a trifle too full for clas-

sical perfection, but its curves were so exquisite, the sensitive play of the lips so lovely, that you never thought of that; the clear tint of her complexion was like the whiteness of some white flower; her hair, of that warm red gold beloved of Titian, was knotted in thick coils at the back of her head, and fell in rippling waves over her low square forehead. There was something wild in the character of Narka's beauty, in the lines of her figure. She stood and moved with the strong, elastic ease of a panther, or of some other grand, free, untamed creature. Beautiful, incomparably more beautiful than Sibyl, there was nevertheless something wanting to her beauty which that of Sibyl possessed, impalpable but distinct, something which marks the difference between a highly finished work of art and a spontaneous growth of Nature in her happiest and most generous mood. This difference was not noticeable except when the patrician sister was brought into close contact with the plebeian, and even then no one was conscious of it, perhaps, but Narka herself. She knew that she was beautiful, and far more gifted in many ways than Sibyl, and yet she felt as much her inferior as the lowly born maid in mediæval times may have felt herself below the noble demoiselle in whose train she was brought up.

The three friends were chatting over their teacups, planning costumes for a fancy ball that was to take place at the castle before Christmas.

"I wish I could hit upon something that would combine everything," Marguerite said, putting her head on one side with a pretty bird-like motion very characteristic of her, and which always amused Basil Zorokoff.

"Why don't you consult me, cousin?" he said, holding out his cigarette between his first and second fingers and gazing steadily at Marguerite; but the twinkle in

his blue eyes belied the extreme seriousness of his handsome face.

"Well?" said Marguerite, with another bewildering turn of her head from left to right.

"Little Red Riding-hood would suit you to perfection. The color would be becoming, and your eyes would shine like diamonds under the scarlet hood, and you would look like a Lilliputian Venus in the short petticoats."

"And you would play the wolf and howl at me?"

"And crunch you up; that I should do with great satisfaction!"

"How many wolves' skins would it take to make a costume for you, I wonder?" said Marguerite, measuring the tall young fellow's height with a glance of saucy impertinence. "A pity it is so early in the winter, or you might go and shoot half a dozen. How exciting it must be to hear them howling in the forest! They never come till Christmas, do they?"

Basil had not time to answer when a distant sound, penetrating through the heavily curtained windows, made them all start.

"There it is again!" said Narka.

"What is it?" said Marguerite.

"Listen!" Sibyl held up her finger, and the gentlemen put down their cigarettes.

A long dismal howl, perceptibly nearer this time, was again audible.

"Is it a wolf?" asked Marguerite under her breath.

"At this time of the year?" said M. de Beaucrillon. "You were just now telling me that they never came till the snow was deep?"

"No more they do," replied Basil. "I never before knew, except when I was a child—"

"There it is again!" interrupted Sibyl, "and this time quite close. Let us go up to the gallery."

"Oh, how dreadful!" exclaimed Marguerite, who seemed too horrified to move. "If he were to dash at the windows and break in!"

"He certainly would if he saw you, little cousin," said Basil; "but as he can't, we have nothing to fear. Come along up to the gallery, and see what a live wolf looks like."

He drew her arm through his, and led her off, excited and only half reluctant. The others had all fled up before them, and were already grouped in the deep mullioned window at the further end of the gallery, the only one that was in shadow, for it was a brilliant night, and the full moon, riding high in the heavens, sent as her largess broad bars of silver light through the row of eight windows on one side of the gallery. Basil, still holding Marguerite's arm within his, joined the others, and they all stood watching.

The broad gravel-drive shone like granite in the dazzling whiteness of the moonshine; one wing of the castle was in black shadow, the other in brilliant light, every arch and moulding carved in ebony and silver.

"Where is the brute sneaking?" said Basil.

"He can't be far off," said Narka. "The last howl was very close."

They waited with bated breath. Nothing stirred. The park was so silent you might have heard the stars twinkling.

"Look! there he is!" exclaimed Sibyl, in a whisper, pointing toward the clock tower, that was in shadow.

They pressed closer, and strained their eyes.

"I see him!" Marguerite cried, and, shuddering, she clutched Basil's arm, as if safety lay in his coat sleeve.

Basil bore it manfully. "Never fear, little cousin. See, he is coming on!"

The beast advanced a few steps and paused, one half of his lank gray body in shadow, the other in sheen. Suddenly he pricked his ears, held one forefoot suspended, and turned his head toward the park in an attitude of intense listening.

"Does he hear something?" asked M. de Beaucrillon.

"It looks like it," Basil replied, uneasily. "I will get my gun."

"So will I," said his brother-in-law. And they hurried away together.

Presently the wolf turned his head toward the house, moved forward a few steps, and glared up with his red eyeballs.

To Marguerite there was something delicious in the combination of horror and a sense of comfortable safety that she experienced in looking down at the ferocious animal from behind thick stone walls.

"Do you think he heard us speaking?" she asked, almost under her breath.

Narka's fear and Sibyl's was that he had heard something else. What an age the gentlemen were in bringing their fire-arms! They had in reality been away about two minutes.

"Oh, here they come!" said Sibyl.

"Open the window as quickly and quietly as you can," said Basil. But before there was time to obey, the wolf turned his head, and uttering a long howl, bounded off, and disappeared round the clock tower.

"Confound the brute!" muttered Basil.

"I wonder why he darted away so suddenly?" said Narka.

"Probably it was some noise in the thicket, some

animal prowling about," said Basil; but he did not seem convinced.

"Suppose it were some one coming through the park?" suggested Marguerite. "How awful if it were!"

"Nobody is likely to be out this time of night," replied her cousin.

"Hush! listen!" cried M. de Beaucrillon, laying his hand on Basil's shoulder.

Every ear was strained. Yes, there was a sound of galloping hoofs in the distance.

"Ought we to send out men with fire-arms?" asked Sibyl.

"Where to?" said Basil. "That sound comes from the left, and the brute made for the forest. Besides, no one would be abroad at this hour without fire-arms. I dare say it is Larchoff. I met him riding in to X. this afternoon. He often rides back late. He is sure to be armed. It would be a good joke if the wolf pulled him down and made a meal of him."

"No such luck," cried Narka; "beasts of a species do not prey on each other."

This speech sounded unnaturally cynical on the lips of a young girl. Marguerite shrank imperceptibly away from her, and moved closer to Basil. M. de Beaucrillon felt the same repulsion so strongly that, under pretence of putting aside his gun, he went out of the room. Presently Basil carried his to a safe corner, and then, stepping into the deep embrasure of one of the windows flooded with light, called to Marguerite to join him. She went tripping lightly across the polished floor, and they stood together looking out at the moonlit landscape.

Sibyl and Narka remained alone. They were both more disturbed than they wished to appear. Superstí-

tious as genuine Muscovites, the coming of the wolf before the seasonable time was to them an ill omen, all the more alarming from its vagueness. "The wolf waits for the white carpet," was a saying of the peasants; and when he appeared before the carpet was spread, some calamity was certain to follow.

"Well, cousin, you have had a glimpse of one of our winter amusements. How do you like it?" asked Basil.

"I don't like it at all," replied Marguerite.

"You were saying, only a little while ago, that it must be so exciting, and wanting me to turn wolf and howl at you."

"Do you think the wolf overheard me?"

"I will tell you a secret," said Basil. "I asked the brute to come and howl for you to-night. At first he flatly refused, like the brute that he is; then I bribed him."

"What bribe did you offer him?"

"You won't tell?" He bent his tall figure down until his mustache almost touched her ear. "I told him that Larchoff was coming this way, and that he could sup off him."

"Oh!" said Marguerite, drawing away with a little shudder. "Why do you want that poor man to be devoured by a wild beast?"

"Because that poor man is more destructive than any wild beast alive: he is the devil."

"Is he so wicked? Who is he?"

"Who is Larchoff? He is our neighbor, and dates his descent from Peter the Great, who gave the family a title. He is a liar and a hypocrite, as cruel as a tiger and as greedy as a wolf, cowardly as a rat and dishonest as a Jew; he has all the bad instincts of man and beast combined; he is only fit company for the devil,

and that is where the curses of good men are speeding him night and day."

"Ah! but that is wicked!" said Marguerite, with a shudder. "They ought to pray for him that he might repent."

"Pray for Larchoff!" Basil threw back his head with a low laugh; the notion of anybody praying for Larchoff was immensely funny to him. "If the prayers were heard, and that fiend were to repent and enter the kingdom of heaven, I hope I may go somewhere else! He has done more evil and made more men and women miserable than any man of his generation, unless, perhaps, his master the Czar. You know about old Larchoff, this fellow's father? No? Sibyl never told you? Well, listen. Jacob Larik, Narka's father, was a Jew; they are a vile race, but Jacob was an exception; he was honest, and very rich. He traded in furs, and he was clever and industrious, as the Jews mostly are. He lived in one of Larchoff's villages, unluckily. One day Larchoff, who, like his son, was always in want of money, went to Jacob, and said he must pay down fifty thousand rubles or pack up. Of course Jacob paid them. At the end of six months Larchoff came down on him for another fifty thousand. Jacob paid again; and so it went on until there was no more blood in the stone. Then Jacob fell on his knees and besought Larchoff, for the sake of the God of Abraham, to spare him and give him time to gain the money, and he would go on working and paying while he could; but Larchoff spat on him and mocked him, and then went off and denounced him as deep in a plot against the life of the Emperor. The poor wretch was seized and flogged and tortured to make him confess; and as he could not confess, he was sent to Siberia. Fortunately he died on the road."

"Oh my God! And Narka?"

"Narka was a small toddler at the time. She and her brother Sergius and Madame Larik came to live with us. Narka was educated with Sibyl, Sergius with me; he was such a dear good fellow, and so clever! He wanted to be a physician, and just after old Larchoff died he passed his examinations brilliantly. We were all proud of him, and everybody made much of him; all the people in the district invited him and made a fuss over him. It was very foolish, for it enraged Larchoff *fils;* he knew that his father had been hated for the murder, as it was called, of old Jacob, and that he himself was hated as much as his father. He resolved to be revenged on us all by ruining Sergius. He went and denounced the poor fellow. Oh, it was a damnable piece of work!" said Basil, with suppressed passion.

"What happened him?"

"Sergius? He was sent to Siberia."

"And is he there still?"

"Yes—his bones are there. He lived three years at the gold diggings, and then luckily he died. Poor Sergius!"

"And his mother, and Narka?"

"They lived through it, as people do. It broke their hearts; but people live with broken hearts, as they do with broken legs. We were all very fond of them—Sibyl and Narka are like sisters. My mother always spoke of Narka as her adopted child, and after her death the two were inseparable."

"And that cruel, horrid man stays on here? Does anybody speak to him?"

"Speak to him! They cringe to him, they lick his feet."

"You never speak to him?"

"I spoke to him no later than this afternoon."

"Oh!" in a tone of shocked astonishment.

"My child, if I offended Larchoff, in spite of my father's present influence at court, he would never rest till he had sent me and all belonging to me after the Lariks."

"Is it possible? Why, he must be the devil."

"My sweet cousin, I began by telling you he was."

"And is there nothing to protect people against him? Is there no law in Russia?"

"Yes; there is the law of might and cunning."

After a moment's silence Marguerite said, in a confidential *sotto voce*, looking up at Basil: "I wonder why you don't make a revolution. If I were a Russian I should be a Nihilist—is not that what you call them?"

Basil's eye flashed, and he made a sudden movement as if he would have caught her in his arms; but he checked himself, and said, with a laugh, "If you preach treason of that sort, *petite Française*, I will tell Larchoff, and you will be escorted to the frontier immediately, and perhaps get a whipping first."

While this conversation was going on in the deep recess of one window, Sibyl and Narka were talking confidentially in another.

"I wonder whether Basil thinks at all seriously of Sophie?" Sibyl remarked. "I do long to see him married and out of harm's way!"

"Are you sure that to marry him to the sister of Ivan Gorff would be taking him out of harm's way?"

Sibyl did not answer.

"Supposing it were," resumed Narka, "I could understand *your* overlooking a good deal to make him settle down, as you say; but I can't see how the Prince should be anxious for such a marriage for his son. Paul

Gorff was a trader, and Ivan carries on his father's business—on a grand scale, it is true; still, he is in trade; and the daughter and sister of a trader is not the wife one would expect Prince Zorokoff to select for his son."

"It is hardly a selection. Who else is there to prefer to Sophie? She is the only girl in the district. Basil never goes to St. Petersburg except to pay his court to the Emperor and rush back. You know how he used to entertain us caricaturing all the girls he sees there. Then Sophie's mother was noble; it was considered a dreadful disgrace her making that *mésalliance* with Paul Gorff. Besides, she is sole heiress to her uncle's enormous fortune, and Basil, with all his indifference to money, knows very well that it is not a thing to be despised; for I suspect my father is melting down his fortune as fast as he can at St. Petersburg."

Narka did not reply. She knew well enough that the Gorff money-bags were the bait that was making Prince Zorokoff swallow his pride and court the trader's pretty daughter for his son. But would Basil prove an accomplice in the transaction?

"Basil is far too proud to make a *mésalliance* for money," continued Sibyl, contradicting her last words, for she felt instinctively what was in Narka's mind. "But he does admire Sophie. Besides, he is so chivalrous I believe he would make any sacrifice to deliver her from that brute Larchoff. Ivan says that Larchoff is trying hard to ingratiate himself, and Sophie naturally loathes the sight of him; but if she were to let Larchoff see this, the consequences might be awful to herself and Ivan. We know of what Larchoff is capable."

"Yes," replied Narka, in a level undertone; "but it would not be pleasant to have his vengeance turned upon Basil as a successful rival."

Before Sibyl could answer, M. de Beaucrillon interrupted them.

"It appears the whole house is in a commotion about the wolf," he said. "My man tells me they are prophesying the most appalling events—fires, earthquakes, murders, and I know not what—on the strength of it."

"They are a pack of fools!" Basil called out, walking up with Marguerite through the checkered light. "That wolf came with the best intentions, solely to amuse Marguerite. To-morrow he will provide entertainment for you by giving us an opportunity to hunt him."

"Your Russian hospitality is sublime, *mon cher*," replied M. de Beaucrillon. "The very wild beasts are summoned to contribute to the enjoyment of your guests."

And so, laughing, they went out of the gallery together, and separated for the night.

## CHAPTER II.

THE excitement caused by the appearance of the wolf was increased rather than lessened next morning by the prospect of a hunt, which diverted the superstitious terrors of the household into more healthy sensations. It was a splendid day; the sky was clear as sapphire, and the frosty landscape glittered in the morning light. The news had been taken down to the village at daybreak, and when the ladies came down-stairs the hunt was assembled on the lawn, every available man in the household being present with his gun; the villagers and moujiks in their costumes and sheep-skins, the dogs in force, and all in high good-humor.

Narka and Sibyl entered into the prospect of the sport with keen gusto; but though Marguerite was alive to the picturesque side of the adventure, the idea of a close encounter with such ferocious game was too terrifying to admit of her entering into it with any sympathy.

"Why not set traps for the wolf, instead of exposing men's lives in going to hunt him?" she asked, as they watched the scene on the lawn.

"But then where would be the sport?" cried Narka.

"Yes; that is what the men delight in," said Sibyl; "and that is what wolves are for—to make sport for them."

"It is the nature of men, I suppose, to like such sport," said Marguerite; "but I can't understand your liking it for them. Just think if the wolf were to turn on Gaston or Basil and kill either of them!"

"*Chérie*, I'm not going to think anything so unpleasant," cried Sibyl. "You are a little coward, you French girl."

"Yes, I am; but at any rate I have the courage of my cowardice; I'm not ashamed to own it."

"There is no shame in being a coward for those we love," said Sibyl, caressingly.

Marguerite blushed up scarlet. "No; I dare say even Gaston would be frightened if he saw me going out to fight a wolf." She gave a little sudden turn of her head and looked away.

Narka saw the blush, and saw the movement to hide it. Did "those they love" include for Marguerite somebody besides Gaston? Girls don't blush violently at being suspected of cowardice on their brothers' behalf.

"Here comes Ivan Gorff," said Sibyl, as there emerged from round the clock tower a broad-shouldered, loosely jointed, bushy-headed young man.

Basil broke from a distant group to go and greet him. As the two men walked up the broad gravel-path they presented a striking contrast. Basil was the type of the polished, highly civilized Russian seigneur, very tall, with clear complexion, blue eyes, abundant fair hair, and golden mustache; his countenance was frank and full of intelligence, with a singular mobility of expression.

Ivan Gorff was by no means vulgar or ill-looking, but his large head and massive shoulders, his loosely built frame and his heavy, shuffling gait, showed to increased disadvantage beside the finely proportioned figure and noble bearing of the young Prince.

Ivan paid his respects to the three ladies, raising their hands to his lips after the chivalrous fashion of his countrymen, but he performed the ceremony with a

brusquerie which was the result not so much of shyness as of an awkwardness that seems to be inseparable from a badly built human frame.

"What does the village say, Ivan Gorff?" inquired Sibyl.

"It says that a pack of wolves, variously estimated from five to five-and-twenty, came down and kept up a howling round the castle from midnight till dawn," replied Ivan.

"That is how history gets written," observed M. de Beaucrillon.

"What do they say brought the wolf down?" inquired Sibyl.

"They say he came for no good; they are terrified out of their wits."

"They are a pack of idiots," said Basil. "I suspect some rogue has been trapping cubs in the forest, and the mother came down to look for them. The howl sounded uncommonly like the call of the she-wolf."

"That was the first thing that occurred to me," said Ivan; "but they all swore they knew nothing about cubs being trapped."

"They were sure to swear that anyhow," laughed Basil.

"By-the-way," said Ivan, "the wolf was near trapping a cub of the devil's last night. Larchoff came up with him on the road, and if he had not put a bullet through the brute in time, and sent him yelling away on three legs, he was a dead man."

"Whom did he tell that stunning lie to?" asked Basil.

"Father Christopher. He met Larchoff this morning on his way to see some sick woman in the wood."

"I wish Father Christopher did not meet him so often," said Basil. "He may brave the fellow once too

often, and my father may not be able to pull him out of his fangs."

"Father Christopher never thinks of that," said Narka; "he only thinks of sparing the peasants, of putting himself between them and Larchoff's cruelty. If it were not for Father Christopher, Larchoff would be flaying them alive, and flogging them of a morning to get an appetite for his breakfast."

"Oh!" Marguerite gave a little scream.

"She is only joking, cousin," said Basil. "You should not say those things before her," he added, angrily, to Narka.

"No; it is bad for her French nerves," observed M. de Beaucrillon. He said it seriously, almost solemnly, but Sibyl suspected he was mocking.

"The father is imprudent," she remarked. "It would be much better for everybody concerned if he tried to conciliate Larchoff."

"Yes," said Ivan; "if he would just my-lord-Count him and flatter him a bit, it would serve the peasants better."

"The father is too honest to flatter anybody," said Narka, "much less such a vile thing as Larchoff."

"Pshaw!" said Ivan—"the notion of wasting fine sentiment on a wolf! One talks to a fool according to his folly, and one treats a savage as a savage. The father will find out his mistake too late if he doesn't change his tactics toward Larchoff. Paul the cobbler heard high words between them on the road this morning; he did not catch what the quarrel was about, but Larchoff shouted, 'If you don't keep your tongue warm, you had better pack up.' 'I am always packed up,' said the father; 'I am ready to start every day, and I would rather take the road to Siberia this minute than

abet your villany by holding my tongue.' Paul saw them from behind the wall, and he says Larchoff looked like a mad bull and the father like an angry lion, his head thrown back and his white hair fluttering."

"I wish the father would try and keep out of his way," said Sibyl.

"Yes, but there is no keeping out of the devil's way," said Basil. "He is always about, seeking whom he may devour."

A horn sounded from the lawn.

"Come! let us be on the march," said Basil.

The three gentlemen went out, and presently the hunt moved on.

The ladies watched it out of sight, but when Sibyl turned from the window she missed Marguerite.

"She has gone to pray that they may not be devoured by the wolf," said Narka, in answer to her exclamation of surprise.

"Does she care so very much, do you think—I mean for Basil?"

"She cares enough, I dare say, to say a prayer for him in an emergency."

Sibyl sat down to her tapestry. Narka stood looking out at the window.

"What a blessing it would be if Basil were to fall in love with Marguerite!" said Sibyl, with a sigh as soft and long-drawn as the silk she was pulling through her needle.

Narka gave a curious smile. "You were sighing last night that he might fall in love with Sophie."

"I would sigh for a month if it would help him to fall in love with Marguerite. Sophie has some essentials that would suit, but Marguerite has everything. And she is so gentle!"

"Are you sure such a gentle wife is what Basil wants?"

"He admires gentleness in a woman immensely. Most men do."

"It does not follow that it would suit him best. Basil wants a wife that he could lean upon—a woman who would guide him. Sophie has plenty of character, and a very strong will; she turns her brother round her finger."

"I should not like Basil to be turned round his wife's finger. But you are mistaken in fancying that Marguerite lacks character: she has plenty of character, only it is kept down by her French training. Wait till she is married, and then you will see how she will develop. French girls are all like that."

"Would she marry a schismatic?"

"Ah, that is the one obstacle. But if Basil tried, I am certain he might overcome it. If he would only make Marguerite fall in love with him!"

Something magnetic made Sibyl turn and look at Narka. "Why do you smile like that?" she said. "Don't you think a girl might love Basil?"

"You and I have managed to love him."

"How silly you are sometimes, with all your cleverness, Narka! I mean a girl who is nothing to him. If I were a girl—not his sister—I should easily fall in love with him. Don't you think you would?—if he tried to make you?"

"Perhaps. The Princess used to say that a woman never could tell whether a man could make her love him or not until he tried. I dare say she was right."

Sibyl raised one hand, and let it drop lightly on the canvas with a gesture of utter amazement.

"To think that you of all women should not believe

Basil capable of winning any girl he set his heart on!" she exclaimed—"Basil, who has everything that can make a man charming!"

"Charm is very much a matter of individual taste and sympathy," said Narka, and she lapsed into silence. Presently she turned from the window, and went to the piano, and sat down, running her fingers over the keys in an impromptu prelude which she accompanied at first in a low, almost inarticulate murmur; but by degrees the tones rose, and the rich voice gave forth its power, uttering in music the passionate thought that seemed so often folded in Narka's silence, and never expressed itself freely but in song. Her voice was one of those rare and rich instruments that combine every quality; it had the warm, mellow tones of a contralto, and the range of a soprano, the high notes ringing out with bell-like clearness, the lower soft as oil poured out: it was a voice that would have made a fortune on the stage, so powerful it was, so brilliant, and at the same time of such melting sweetness. Narka never looked so beautiful as when she was singing, and she would go on warbling and trilling for hours, never tired, like a bird whose natural speech was song.

## CHAPTER III.

THE wolf hunt proved a failure. The sportsmen came home without having seen or scented the game of which they had gone in search. It had been discovered, however, that a peasant in one of Larchoff's villages had trapped a cub two days before, and carried it off to his father in the village beyond Yrakow. This discovery was a great relief to the population, and calmed their terrors by giving a natural explanation of the premature appearance of the unwelcome visitor. It was evidently the mother that had come down to look for her stolen cub.

"All the same," Narka remarked, "I wish the week were past, and that we were safe over the adventure."

"You don't seriously believe that it forebodes evil, mademoiselle?" said M. de Beaucrillon, looking at her with amused incredulity.

"I seriously believe in precedent and tradition," replied Narka. "It is a thing unprecedented for the wolf to come down before the snow without some calamity suddenly following. In the Prince's childhood a wolf was seen in the village one night in October, and the next day a fire broke out, and two-thirds of the houses were burnt down."

"That is conclusive evidence, certainly; the wolf was evidently an incendiary," observed M. de Beaucrillon, gravely.

"It is very well for you to laugh, Gaston," said Sibyl; "but you have your superstitions in Burgundy too, and

a score of precedents that everybody at Beaucrillon believes in. I wish we were safe out of the week."

"A week is the limit of the danger?" said Gaston, with provoking coolness. "If it is not fulfilled within that time, the wolf is voted a false prophet?"

"It so happens that hitherto it always has been fulfilled within the week," replied Sibyl.

M. de Beaucrillon in his secret soul hoped that it would be fulfilled this week. He was beginning to feel the place so deadly dull that it would have been a mercy if the wolf brought any change to enliven things. Even a fire in the village would be better than nothing. Gaston had only been three weeks at Yrakow, and it was palling on him horribly. The magnificent vastness of the castle, the barbaric splendor of the interior, the immensity of the grounds, the immensity of the forest, the scale of immensity on which everything within and without was constructed, made the sense of desolateness produced by the smallness of the social element proportionately immense. The immobility of life in this enormous palace, with its galleries as long as streets, and its rooms as big as courts, and its halls as vast as ordinary squares, was overpowering. There were seventy servants in the household, but they made no more life in the place than the flies on the pane. M. de Beaucrillon sauntered through the vast apartments, and smoked countless cigars, and felt as if he were walking in an enchanted castle where everybody was under a spell of somnolence. Basil was an excellent host, and did all he could to wake up the sleeping inhabitants, but Basil himself was under the spell. He did not understand the need for being always awake; he went spasmodically from mercurial activity to absolute idleness, from hunting a wolf, and similar out-door exercises, to

lounging by the hour on the flat of his back with a cigar in his mouth; he spent hours dreaming and writing in his private study, emerging thence in alternate moods of high excitement and profound melancholy. M. de Beaucrillon was very fond of his brother-in-law, but he did not understand him; Basil, for all his physical strength and reckless courage, seemed to him more a woman than a man, a creature made of contradictions, of impulses, of passionate emotions and exaggerations.

The day after the hunt, Marguerite and Narka went out for a ride. As they passed through the village, Narka pointed out the cottage where she and her mother resided since Sibyl's marriage.

"You must take me to pay a visit to Madame Larik as soon as she's well enough," said Marguerite. "When will that be?"

"In a few days, I hope," Narka replied, looking pleased and grateful. "She has been much better this last week, and has had good nights: that is why I have been able to stay at the castle. It is seldom that her rheumatism is so bad at this season, poor dear mother!"

"Ought she not go to some German baths for it?" said Marguerite.

"Yes, she ought; and I hope some day to be able to take her to Aix-la-Chapelle. Some day sounds vague," Narka added, in answer to a look in Marguerite's face; "but we are waiting on a legacy that is to come to us from an old relative of mother's. I have never seen him, so it is not very cynical of me to look forward to enjoy his money—is it? And the doctor assures me Aix would do wonders for my mother."

"And then you will come on and spend the autumn at Beaucrillon and the winter in Paris."

"That would be a charming programme," said Narka, smiling, "but mother has a great desire to spend a month in Munich, her native place, and then to make a little tour in Germany; and I don't know whether the legacy would admit of all that and a journey to France. Though, with our simple habits, a little money would go a long way."

Marguerite had lost sight of this fact in Narka's position, that she and her mother were very poor, dependent almost wholly on the generosity of the Zorokoffs, who had given them a cottage and a large garden.

"But you have travelled already?" Marguerite said.

"I have been to St. Petersburg several times with the Princess; we spent some winters there, and had masters. It was there chiefly that I learned singing. The Princess had me taught by a great Italian master from Rome. What a delightful man he was, and how I did enjoy his lessons! We used to go twice a week to the opera—your aunt was so good to me! She was an angel, the Princess. I was always sorry she was not Russian."

Marguerite smiled. "I hope you will come soon to France and stay with us," she said. "I do so long to convert you!"

"That would be a cruel trick to play me. I should be either sent to Siberia or put into a dungeon for the rest of my life."

"Oh! I did not mean a religious conversion; I meant to convert you to being a little more French and a little less Russian. They would not put you in prison for that?"

"No, they would not put me in prison for that. But ought you not to be satisfied with having converted Sibyl? Don't you think she is a very creditable convert?"

"On the whole; but she has many heresies still; she maintains, for instance, that the climate here is better than in France, that she never felt so cold in St. Petersburg as she does in Paris. She also clings to the belief that a paternal Muscovite government is the best in the world. There is only one point on which her conversion is entirely satisfactory. She admits that French husbands are perfection. Would it be hopeless to try to convert you to that belief, Narka?"

"Quite!"—spoken very emphatically.

"How heartily you say that! I don't wonder you owe a grudge to the race for having stolen away Sibyl. What a loss she must have been to you!"

"And not to me only. Her departure left all these poor people"—glancing round over the country—"at the mercy of the Jews and the bureaucrats, who prey on them like wolves."

"But don't the Prince and Basil protect them?"

"Basil does what he can; but he has not much power. As to the Prince, he is nearly always at St. Petersburg, looking after the future. Meanwhile the Stanovoï, who is a grasping, cruel man, has it all his own way; he and Larchoff are in league—a pair of devils."

"The Prince must be a very odd man," Marguerite said, looking confidential. "My maid tells me stories about his goings on when he is here that would make one think he was stark, staring mad."

Narka laughed. "I dare say he would be locked up as a lunatic in any country but Russia; but his madness is harmless enough—more so, indeed, than his saneness. He keeps everybody in commotion day and night while he is here. He never goes to bed or undresses at night; he smokes and drops asleep in a chair, sitting bolt-upright; every now and then he falls off his chair

and bangs himself on the ground; and then he starts up, seizes his gun, that is always beside him, rushes to the window, and fires out at the night. He does this four times, rushing to the four sides of the house as fast as he can go, and throwing open the windows with as much noise as he can make. Sibyl and Basil had the greatest difficulty to prevent him doing it this last time; they said you would all be so frightened, and they should not know what to say to you to explain it."

Marguerite's eyes grew round with amazement. "And was that why the Prince ran away in such a hurry?"

"Probably that had something to do with his flight. He says he can never sleep a night through here without exercising himself in fire-arms, and he pretends it is protection to the village against wolves and Larchoff."

"He certainly would pass for a lunatic in France," said Marguerite, her face breaking into dimples of suppressed laughter. "And used he go on in that way when Aunt Isabelle was alive?"

"Not so badly. She kept him in order. He gave her his word once that he would not shoot at the night for a month; but one night he jumped out of bed and emptied his revolver through the window as fast as he could shoot; the Princess rushed in and caught him in the act, and he declared he had been asleep and dreaming, and had no intention of breaking his word. He went back to bed; but presently she and all of us heard a noise from down-stairs of some one howling in pain. We all rushed out to see what was the matter, and there in the middle of the hall was the Prince whipping himself with all his might, and roaring like a bull. He said he could not go to sleep with remorse for having broken his word, and felt he must get up and whip him-

self as he would have had one of the servants whipped for offending in the same way. The Princess besought him to stop, but he would not; he went on whipping and yelling till he had given himself the number of stripes he thought proper, and then he went up to bed; his back was scarred with welts, and hurt him for days."

Marguerite was seized with such an immoderate fit of laughter that she had to rein in her horse and go at a foot's pace till it was over. "Why, he is as mad as any maniac in Charenton!" she exclaimed, when she was able to speak.

"He is a little eccentric," said Narka; "but his eccentricities are all very harmless. The Princess kept them within bounds, and so did Sibyl in a lesser degree."

"I don't wonder you miss Sibyl."

They cantered on a little way without speaking.

"There is one good thing that has come to me out of Sibyl's departure," Narka resumed. "It has led to mother's and my living in the village. You can't get really to sympathize with the sufferings of people, and help them, until you come close enough to share them; we never realize them so long as we are in a fool's paradise of luxury and ease. The pain of poverty is like every other pain; nothing but personal experience can make us understand it, and teach us the kind of relief it wants. It is like a man born in the tropics trying to realize cold from a description in a book. He never could do it. No description could give him the physical sensation of feet and hands tingling and perishing, of blood chilled in his veins, of eyes blinded and smarting in a bitter icy wind. He must leave the tropics and go up into a Northern climate to know what it all means. To live in a great palace amidst luxury and abundance

of every sort is like living in the tropics. I never realized what our wretched peasants had to endure until I came to live amongst them in the village, and saw how they suffer in every way—from poverty, from the climate, from ignorance, and, above all, from the cruelty of the Jews and the government officials."

"But is there no redress? Is there no justice to be had for them?"

"Father Christopher keeps telling them they will get justice in the next world."

"Even in this there are laws to protect the weak against the strong. God has not left Himself without witnesses on the earth."

"I wonder where His witnesses are in Russia?" Narka laughed.

"The people themselves are His witnesses; they believe and they hope in Him."

"Then why does He let them be crushed and tortured and destroyed?"

"Oh, Narka, that pagan 'why' is always in your mouth!"

"It is in the mouth of the people everywhere—everywhere. They are down-trodden, and oppressed, and made to suffer injustice."

"Not in France," protested Marguerite. "The people are not down-trodden there."

"They are in Russia. Why are they? Why does God permit it? If His justice is anywhere on earth, it ought to be everywhere—in Russia as well as in France."

"Wrong cannot be made right in a day. We must be patient."

"We *are* patient, heroically patient—under the wrongs and sufferings of others." The passionate irony in Narka's voice sounded more bitter than the words themselves.

"I am sure we are trying to make the world less bad and life less hard on the poor," said Marguerite. "Don't you think that they have much less to suffer now than they had a thousand years ago?—or even a hundred?"

"In France, I dare say, thanks to your glorious Revolution."

"Oh, Narka! you call it glorious? That dreadful reign of terror, when the people rose up against God and murdered the King!" Marguerite felt again that vague repulsion which had made her more than once shrink away from Narka.

"The people rose against a reign of tyranny that had ended by driving them mad. Would that Russia could follow the example of France, and have her revolution!"

Marguerite was shocked at the passionate hatred expressed in Narka's tone and words; but she remembered her father dropping on the road into exile, and her young brother dying in Siberia, and revulsion gave way to pity.

"If you ever make a revolution in Russia," she said, "let it be a revolution of love, not of hate."

Narka laughed. "And burst our chains by kissing them."

"There is nothing love might not do if people would only believe in it," said Marguerite; "if only they would let it rule the world instead of hatred. If they would let it have its way like the blessed sunshine it would turn this world into a paradise. I wonder why people can't believe in love?"

As she threw back her head, and put this question to the winter sky, there was a light in her eyes that contrasted strikingly with the flame in Narka's—the light of love and the flame of hate—hate just in its cause and

cruelly provoked, but even in those beautiful eyes its effect was repulsive.

Narka was surprised to see what strength of feeling lay beneath the bright, buoyant, and seemingly thoughtless happiness of the young French girl. Sibyl was right: there were slumbering forces underlying Marguerite's nature which only needed certain opportunities to develop. Narka felt this recognition forced upon her, and she would not perhaps have acknowledged that the discovery caused her something like a sense of alarm or disappointment. The two girls, as by tacit consent, put their horses into a canter, and rode on a long way without exchanging a word.

At last Narka said, "We must not forget that we have to get back." She looked at her watch, and saw that it was four o'clock. They turned their horses' heads homeward.

In those Northeastern countries the twilight is short, and night closes in almost as suddenly as the dropping of a curtain. When they re-entered the village of Yrakow it was growing dark; the moon had risen, and a few stars had sprung out. Just as the castle came in sight the two riders were startled by shrieks that seemed to come from the forest. They pulled up their horses and stopped to listen. In a moment the groom, whom a curve in the road had hidden, came trotting up, and said something in Russian which evidently alarmed Narka. She was going to turn back, when some further information from the servant caused her to change her intention, and she went on.

"What has happened?" inquired Marguerite.

"He does not know, but he saw Sophie Gorff running from the road without anything on her head."

"Was she running from the wolf, do you think?"

"That is not likely: the wolf would have been pursuing her." Narka stopped her horse again and hesitated; but after a short parley with the groom she rode on again.

"Sophie is out of harm's way now, at any rate," she said. "Dmitri saw her cross the road toward her own house. What could it have been?"

Moved by lingering curiosity, they both cast a backward glance toward the forest. As they looked, they heard the report of a gun.

"Who can be shooting at this hour?" exclaimed Narka. "It must be as black as night in the forest."

Presently they saw the figure of a man carrying a gun emerging from the road adjoining the park.

"It is Basil, I do believe," said Marguerite. "I dare say it was he who frightened Sophie." She called out and made signs with her whip, but Basil held on his way, and strode across the park without looking round.

"How stupid of him not to hear!" said Marguerite.

"Perhaps he hears, but does not want to come out of his way."

"Is he such a boor as to do that? No Frenchman alive would be capable of anything so rude," protested Marguerite, indignantly.

Narka's face positively beamed as she looked at her. "You think Frenchmen are so much more gallant? You think Russians are boors?"

"I think Basil is behaving like a boor, and I shall tell him so," said Marguerite, with the prettiest show of offended dignity.

Narka gave a light laugh that sounded musically sweet.

"I want to stop a few minutes here," Marguerite said, as they came to the little Catholic chapel. "Do you

mind going on alone, and leaving Dmitri to mind my horse?"

"Why may I not wait and come in with you?" said Narka.

"Oh! if you don't mind."

They both alighted and went in.

The chapel was merely an oratory attached to the house where Father Christopher lived. It had been built for him by the Princess when his office of tutor to Basil came to an end. The Roman Catholics at Yrakow were few, and these with others scattered through neighboring villages on Prince Zorokoff's estates were the persons who profited by the old priest's ministry. His congregation was composed chiefly of foreigners—professors and servants—residing in families or living in the villages; but, small as it was, it gave him a good deal to do, owing to the distances over which it was scattered. He had to visit the sick in places a long way off, and these distant visits were one of the whips that Larchoff held over the father's head. They afforded an outward semblance of truth to the charge of proselyting which Larchoff was constantly threatening to bring against him, and which in Russia is regarded as a heinous crime, visited, like high treason, with the penalty of death.

The little chapel was almost dark; there was no light but the red glow of the sanctuary lamp. A few worshippers were kneeling in the shadows, waiting for Father Christopher to come into the confessional. Marguerite knelt down at the altar rail, and was at once absorbed in her devotions. Narka, from a *prie-dieu* a little behind, watched her with an odd mixture of admiration, envy, and satisfaction. The faith that could thus absorb a human being in an instant must be very strong

—too strong to be shaken by any earthly feelings, by any mundane interests, by any promptings of passion. Narka had had a glimpse into Marguerite's nature, and that glimpse had shown her, beneath the light, child-like exterior, a woman endowed with a supernatural creed which makes the weakest creature invulnerable against self, fitting her to cope victoriously with perils against which mere natural strength is frail and faithless. How fervently the girl prayed! In the red light of the lamp above her Narka could see her lips moving rapidly. She envied her being able to pray like that. But it was easy, for Marguerite to do so; it was easy for *her* to believe in God's love, and call Him Father, and ask that His will might be done. He *had* been a father to her, and His will had been always kind and loving. He had not tried her faith by injustice and cruel wrong; He had not confounded her hope and turned it to despair. This loss of faith in an Almighty love was perhaps the bitterest suffering which the hard ways of God and man inflicted on their helpless victims, Narka thought, as she watched the happy young French girl praying.

They had not been many minutes in the chapel when Father Christopher entered from the sacristy, and after kneeling a moment before the tabernacle, went into the confessional.

Marguerite stood up, and whispered to Narka,

"Would there be time for me to wait and go to confession now?"

"Oh no," Narka replied; "it is too late. You had better come to-morrow morning. You will find him before mass."

Marguerite assented, and they went out and rode home.

## CHAPTER IV.

THEY were now assembled in the drawing-room, Sibyl busy at her tapestry, Narka sitting, with her long white hands in her lap, waiting to pour out the tea, Marguerite turning over the leaves of a book of old engravings with an air of excited interest, M. de Beaucrillon deep in his newspapers, and Basil measuring the long length of the room, slowly pacing up and down, his hands in his pockets and a cigarette in his mouth, his handsome face clouded by an air of abstraction, almost of sadness, as his thoughts were far away from the company grouped round the lamp. Presently, passing near the table, he looked up, and his eyes rested on his cousin. It was a picture on which any man's eyes must have rested complacently. Marguerite's face had little claim to admiration beside Sibyl's blond loveliness and Narka's rich beauty of line and coloring, and yet there was a charm about its irregular features that made it no contemptible rival to either. It was the very personification of youthful brightness and health; the small spirited nose was more piquant than if it had been classical, and the whole face sparkled with happiness and curiosity. This evening all her prettiness and brightness were further enhanced by an irresistible little demi-toilet of a white gauzy material, rose-colored ribbons in bows and loops sprouting out of the white foam as naturally as the rose-colored flower sprouted out of the curls and coils of her glossy brown hair. Marguerite was intent on the en-

gravings. Suddenly, with an exclamation of dismay, "Sibyl," she cried, "I have made a dreadful mistake!"

They all looked up, interested and attentive. Basil stopped in his walk to hear.

"That head-dress that I sketched and sent to Paris for will be out of keeping. I now remember it was in a portrait of Velasquez that I saw it; so fancy how it will clash with that Florentine thirteenth-century costume! What shall I do?"

"What were we all thinking about?" said Sibyl. Then, after a moment's reflection: "Really, ma chèrie," she added, "I don't think you need worry about it. No one here is likely to find out the anachronism. If it were in Paris, now—"

"That is a pretty character you are giving us," said Basil, who had been listening with intense amusement to Marguerite's distressing confession. "You want to make out that in Russia we are a set of barbarians and dunces."

"Dear, I would not worry about it," Sibyl continued, addressing herself with sympathetic earnestness to Marguerite. "As a head-dress it will suit you beautifully, and that is the great point. Not that I *fully* approved of your choice of the costume; you know I said I thought a Greuze would suit you better."

"A Greuze!" exclaimed Basil, contemptuously, and he threw his hands up to the ceiling. "Trust one pretty woman for advising another to her ruin! You ought to have consulted a man, cousin; you ought to have consulted me; I would have advised you *honestly*, to your advantage. Since you won't be Red Riding-hood, and let me play Wolf to you, why shouldn't you go as Jezebel or Judith?—Jezebel with a hatchet, or Judith with a drawn sword? I'll lend you one as big as yourself, and

show you how to carry it. You would look superbly tragic in a Jewish turban. Or, if you like something more modern, there is Charlotte Corday—"

Marguerite seized one of Sibyl's balls of wool, took aim, and hit the scoffer right on the nose.

"Bravo! What a capital shot! If this had been a bullet aimed at my heart, I was a dead man," said Basil, catching the ball and weighing it in his hand. "By-the-way, as you are such a shot, little cousin, why should not you go as Diana the huntress? I will teach you how to draw the bow if you like."

"Cousin Basil," said Marguerite, slapping the engraving of Anne of Austria with a heavy paper-knife, and facing her tormentor, "I can't think why I don't hate and detest you, for you aggravate me more than anybody I know."

"That is precisely why," said Basil.

"Why what?"

"Why you are so fond of me. It's because I aggravate you."

"Oh!—is it? Well, just leave off aggravating, and see if I don't grow fonder and fonder of you."

"You might grow too fond of me!" surveying her with a comical air of alarm.

She glanced up at him with a flash of mirth and mischief in her brown eyes. "Well," she said, slowly, as if weighing consequences, "I might; but I'll risk it, if you don't mind."

He sat down opposite to her, leaned forward, and began stroking his silken beard meditatively; this skirmishing with his pretty cousin was delightful. "It is a desperate risk for me to run," he remarked, solemnly.

"Run it!" said Sibyl, entering merrily into the fray; "don't be a coward!"

"I'll tell you what," said Marguerite, slapping Anne of Austria again with the paper-knife, "here are three competent judges: there is Narka, an artist and a mystic; Sibyl, a superior and cultivated woman; Gaston, a philanthropist and a politician."

"Heavens! what names you are giving us all!" protested M. de Beaucrillon, laying down his newspaper and looking up in surprised expectation.

Something in her brother's astonished face, or perhaps a twinkle in Basil's eye, recalled Marguerite to the fact that she was on slippery ground, and cut short the appeal she was about to make to the three judges. "I wish Gaston would tell you not to be so disagreeable," she said, turning away like a naughty child, and blushing as red as the flower in her hair.

"For goodness' sake don't set them fighting, or there will be no living in the house!" protested Sibyl, coming to the rescue with her subtle tact, for she saw Marguerite's embarrassment; "and we shall want peace amongst ourselves if we are to keep any kind of order amongst our friends and relations."

"How many are we going to be, all told—do you know?" asked Basil.

"About three hundred."

"All staying in the house!" exclaimed Marguerite. "Oh! how many guest-rooms have you?"

"Seventy-five. But then there is the armory; about a hundred manage to sleep there; they did at my marriage."

"But there are no beds in the armory," said Marguerite, more and more amazed.

"We don't put up beds," said Basil. "People bring their own beds and pillows; that is our barbarian mode of proceeding."

"What fun!" said Marguerite. "It must be like camping out, with all the warriors and coats of mail mounting guard over one. I dare say they enjoy it very much."

"They seemed to do so last time, if one might judge from the noise they made," remarked Narka, who had been silent for a long time, and watching Marguerite with a coldly critical expression that would have frightened the girl if she had noticed it. "They kept it up till all hours of the morning, and I got very little sleep, for my room was over the encampment."

"They did make a most infernal racket one night," said Basil, with a boyish laugh, as if the recollection of the racket were very pleasant. "Some youngster proposed that they should all get into the coats of mail and march out into the park like a phantom procession, and frighten the wits out of everybody. The joke was at once adopted, and they were buckling themselves into the armor, when Larchoff, who was too drunk to know what he was about, pulled off his boot and began to hammer at some warrior's helmet. They had to fall on him, half a dozen of them, and strap him into a big suit of mail, and then bind his legs so that he had to lie quiet. He bellowed under the operation like a bull. It was awful. No wonder Narka could not sleep. I hope you won't put Larchoff in the armory this time, Sibyl."

"You don't mean to say that that dreadful man is invited!" Marguerite exclaimed, in a tone of incredulity.

"He was not invited then," said Sibyl; "but he thought it would be pleasant, so he came without being asked. Larchoff *ne se gêne pas.*"

"I can't understand your letting him into the house at all," said Marguerite.

"My cousin, there are many things in this country

that you can't understand," remarked Basil, with a peculiar laugh.

There were indeed very few things in Russian life, it seemed to Marguerite, that she could understand. The mixture of Oriental magnificence and barbarous discomfort, of lavish expenditure and shabby makeshift—letting guests bring their bedding and encamp on floors, and setting them gold plate to eat off—these things were in their way as puzzling to her as that Prince Zorokoff should tolerate under his roof and admit to his table such a wretch as Larchoff.

M. de Beaucrillon had not been joining in the conversation; he had been deep in his newspapers; but he had now finished them, and got up and drew a chair to the tea-table. "Mademoiselle, I should like a cup of tea," he said.

Narka took the teapot from the samovar, and was proceeding to pour out the tea, when the door opened, and Vasili, Basil's valet, pale and scared, stood on the threshold, and said something in Russian. It was answered by an exclamation of horror from the three who understood.

"What is the matter?" asked M. de Beaucrillon.

The man, who spoke French freely, replied, "Count Larchoff has been murdered!"

For a moment horror seemed to have rendered every one speechless; then they plied Vasili with questions. His story was short. Two peasants had found the count lying in the forest with a gunshot wound in his chest. They thought he was dead, and carried him to the nearest cottage. He regained consciousness, and tried hard to say something, but no one could understand. At last they distinguished the words "Forgive! forgive! Father Christopher." They thought he wanted to con-

fess, and some one ran for Father Christopher, while two others fetched the doctor and the pope. Father Christopher was nearest; he was in the confessional when the message came, and rushed out as he was. When he got to the cottage, Larchoff was still breathing. By the time the pope arrived it was all over.

"Who brought this news?" Basil inquired.

"Paul the cobbler."

"And at what time is it supposed the murder was committed?"

"About sundown. The count was found at eight o'clock, and the doctor said the wound must have bled for three or four hours."

"Oh, Narka!" cried Marguerite, turning a shade paler, "that must have been the shot we heard." She stopped short, terrified by the expression on Narka's face; and glancing involuntarily toward Basil, she read an answering horror in his eyes.

Sibyl and Gaston, who were trying to elicit further details from Vasili, had noticed nothing. A sudden noise made them look quickly round.

Marguerite had fainted. She fell forward, and must have fallen to the ground if Basil had not caught her in his arms.

"Poor child! No wonder she is overcome!" Sibyl exclaimed, rushing to assist.

Basil carried the fainting girl to a divan, and laid her gently down.

"You had better go away, both of you, and leave her to us," Sibyl said. "It will be nothing."

The two gentlemen saw they could be of no use, and went away, Gaston too much excited by the awful event which had caused Marguerite's swoon to attach much importance to so natural an accident.

The swoon lasted nearly an hour, in spite of Sibyl's incessant application of restoratives and Narka's constant friction of Marguerite's hands and feet. When at last Marguerite opened her eyes and gave signs of returning consciousness, Narka said:

"We had better let her sit up now. Bring a cushion from the red sofa—a big one." Then, Sibyl having moved away, she bent over Marguerite, and said, in a whisper: "Don't let idle fears disturb you, dear. Keep perfect silence for a while."

She raised her to a sitting position, Sibyl propped her up tenderly, and then, at Narka's suggestion, they left her to recover herself a little.

Meantime Basil and Gaston had gone round to the servants' hall to see Paul the cobbler, and hear the ghastly story over again.

"Let us go down to the village and see Father Christopher," said Gaston, when Paul had confirmed the few details given by Vasili. "We shall hear if any one is suspected of the murder, and if Larchoff was really conscious when the father saw him."

Basil seemed reluctant; he urged that the father could not possibly have any more to tell than they had already heard; but Gaston was bent on it; so they went. It was a beautiful starlight night, but as a matter of course a number of servants lighted lanterns as if it had been pitch-dark, and accompanied the two gentlemen. M. de Beaucrillon would have liked to talk with them, to hear what they thought about the crime, whether their instinct or information pointed with any suspicion to the murderer; but he could not speak Russian, and none of them spoke French, and Basil seemed too stunned to be willing to play the interpreter. He let his companion keep up a monologue without uttering a word.

"I suppose these crimes are not frequent in the rural districts in Russia." "The people in their hearts cannot be sorry to be rid of such a devil, and yet I dare say they will not try to screen the murderer from the police." "The Russian police are wonderfully clever, I believe, but one only hears of them as political agents," etc.

Basil never opened his lips to any of these obviously interrogative remarks, but when Gaston said something about the probable difficulty of finding direct evidence to bring the criminal to justice, he retorted, with sudden vehemence:

"Justice! They will call the bullet that struck down Larchoff justice. The man who fired it will not be a criminal in the eyes of any man, or woman either, in the country for a hundred miles round. They won't call the deed murder; they will call it God's justice overtaking the wicked."

M. de Beaucrillon had not expected to see Basil moved by any feeling of pity for the wretched man whose hands had been a scourge and a sword dealing pain and death unmercifully to his people, but it shocked him a little to hear Sibyl's brother speak in a tone of almost triumphant approval of the bloody deed itself. He made no further comment, and they walked on in silence to Father Christopher's door.

The old priest had just returned from the dead man's house; he was the only person who had accompanied the body thither from the peasant's cottage where it had first been carried. No one else was willing to pay that tribute of respect to Larchoff.

"You have heard the news?" said the father.

"Was he conscious when you got there, father?" inquired M. de Beaucrillon.

"I think he was; I hope he was. I questioned him,

and made an act of faith and contrition, and he pressed my hand very distinctly, and made convulsive efforts to speak. It was awful to see. I pronounced the absolution over him conditionally."

Basil gave a short, explosive laugh, that sounded horrible in Gaston's ears. Father Christopher winced perceptibly; he pulled his beretta forward, then pushed it back.

"Is any one suspected of the murder?" inquired Gaston.

"They are saying it was accidental. The forest has been full of men on the lookout for the wolf, and they think that Larchoff may have been shot by one of them in mistake."

"Is that likely?" asked M. de Beaucrillon.

"It is possible."

There was a pause. "Only this morning," said Father Christopher, breaking it, "the unfortunate man met me, and threatened to send me to Siberia for proselytizing. He had begun by telling me of the escape he had had of being killed by the wolf, riding home last night—how he had fired and hit him just in time. I didn't believe him. Perhaps he was speaking the truth."

"If so, it was the first time it ever happened him," said Basil.

"Well, he has gone before the judgment-seat," said the father. "May God have mercy on him!"

"Mercy on Larchoff! The devil owes him some, for he did his work well."

Basil's handsome features were positively ugly with the expression of hatred that passed over them. Father Christopher had never seen such an expression on his face before. It suddenly occurred to him that Sibyl had more than once expressed uneasy suspicions about her

brother having been lured into associations of some sort with men who made crime and vengeance a part of their political creed. Father Christopher had never attached much importance to these fears; he believed that Basil was incapable of practically committing himself to such dark theories, though he might, partly from instinctive hatred of the cruelties that had provoked them, partly from a spirit of opposition, talk as if he sympathized with them. If the father had been alone with Basil he would have challenged him then and there, and insisted on knowing the truth; for though his old pupil was now a man of four-and-twenty, Father Christopher still looked upon him as a boy, and spoke to him with the frank boldness of a master.

"The village is in a state of great excitement," he remarked, wishing to divert M. de Beaucrillon's attention from Basil's strange demeanor; "there will be little sleep in it to-night."

"I will go down and see Ivan Gorff," said Basil.

"You won't find him," said Father Christopher; "he rode into X. this afternoon, and he had not returned an hour ago; that zealous gossip Paul went there to tell of the murder, and he heard that Mlle. Sophie was ill; the shock of the news brought on a nervous attack."

"No wonder," said M. de Beaucrillon. "My sister fainted when she heard of it. We left her insensible when we came away."

They wished Father Christopher good-night, and went back to the castle.

## CHAPTER V.

MARGUERITE was very ill during the night. In the morning she sent to say she would not come down to breakfast. Sibyl went at once to her room.

"My poor darling," she said, laying her cool cheek against Marguerite's hot face, "to think of our bringing you all this way to frighten you into illness with wolves and murders!"

Marguerite answered with a faint smile, and Sibyl, seeing that the girl was very nervous, and best left quiet and alone, kissed her and came away, and sent for the doctor.

Narka had gone out early to see her mother, who was sure to have heard of the murder, and likely, in her weak state of health, to be seriously affected by the shock.

Mrs. Larik was in truth greatly excited. "So God's vengeance has overtaken the man who murdered my husband and my boy!" she exclaimed, her face quivering. "Ah! the Lord God swore to avenge the widow and the orphan; the Lord God has kept His word!"

"The vengeance can't help us, or give back the dead," replied Narka. "Don't rejoice in it, mother; it can't help us."

But Mrs. Larik was not magnanimous enough to take this negative view of the event. She was a kindly soul; she would not have crushed a worm; but she was an injured woman, made a widow and sonless by Larchoff and his father, and it was not in human nature that she should not feel a thrill of satisfaction at this deed of

vengeance wrought upon the enemy who had crushed the joy out of her life.

Narka let her talk on awhile, but seeing that she was exciting herself overmuch, she said, irrelevantly, "Marguerite wanted to come and see you yesterday; do you think you would be able to see her to-day?"

"No, no; not to-day. My pains are sure to be very bad to-day. You know they are always worse when my mind is worried."

"I thought it might help you to forget the pains and the worry a minute. She is very merry and pleasant, and very nice to me."

"In a few days, when I have got over it a bit, but not to-day, not to-day. I can't think how you could ask me such an unreasonable thing, Narka, as to see a stranger to-day."

"Then I shall make her wait, little mother; there is no hurry," said Narka, soothingly; and she arranged the pillows, and fussed about the nervous, irritable invalid, and talked of household matters, and did what she could to cheer her and turn her mind to practical interests. Narka was not the same being with her mother and with the rest of the world; every tone, every touch, was full of deprecating tenderness; her strength became as the weakness of a little child when she was nursing and caressing and humoring the peevish, loving, broken-spirited widow who had only her left to care for. When M. de Beaucrillon said to Sibyl, "Your Narka is too grand and cold for me; she is not human enough; she is like a goddess made out of marble and gold," Sibyl replied, "If you saw her with her mother you would not say that."

They were at breakfast when Narka got back to the castle. She had scarcely sat down when a servant came

in to say that Pakol Pasgoiroiwitch, the Stanovoï's clerk, was outside, wanting to speak to Prince Basil.

"Let the dog wait," was Basil's contemptuous reply. "Does he think I am going to get up from my breakfast to attend to him?"

The servant looked as if he had something he wished to say—something that would explain; but after a second's hesitation he decided not to say it, and withdrew. He had hardly closed the door when Basil rose impulsively and went out after him. Pakol Pasgoiroiwitch was standing in the hall; the door was ajar, and the voices were audible in the breakfast-room. Some words reached Sibyl and Narka which made them change color and start. Before they had time to exchange a word, Basil flung the door open and came back, followed by Pakol Pasgoiroiwitch.

Basil looked at the man as if ordering him to speak.

"The murderer has been discovered," said Pakol Pasgoiroiwitch, with a stolid, neutral face, like a mask.

An exclamation of impatient curiosity came from the two ladies.

"Father Christopher is the man who committed it!"

Sibyl almost screamed, and after staring blankly at the messenger, dropped into her seat. Narka stood as if turned to stone.

"What is it?" inquired M. de Beaucrillon, curious and impatient.

Basil explained. The man went on to deliver his message, looking all the while as unmoved as a wooden figure might have done. Information had reached the authorities that morning; the father's gun was found loaded in the sacristy, with one chamber empty; the father had been seen hurrying from the forest at the time of the murder: all this evidence was substantiated.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed M. de Beaucrillon, when it had been translated to him; "but you could not hang a dog on such evidence."

"Not in France," retorted Basil; "but we are in Russia, and the Stanovoï thinks Father Christopher is guilty."

"He thinks nothing of the sort. It's his business to think everybody guilty till he finds out who is. Why doesn't he suspect you and me? He would find both our rifles with a couple of chambers empty. Bon Dieu! The thing is beyond belief; it is monstrous."

"Father Christopher!" Sibyl repeated, in a tone of stupefied amazement.

"Have they arrested him?" asked Narka, who had remained rooted to the spot where she heard the news.

"Yes; about an hour ago."

"You can go," said Basil, with haughty abruptness.

The man bowed to his knees, and withdrew.

Everybody seemed struck dumb for a moment after the door had closed. Then Basil exploded in a muttered curse, and walked to the window.

"What motive can any one have had in getting up such a preposterous story?" asked M. de Beaucrillon.

"Oh! the motive is not far to seek," said Sibyl. "The father is hated by the Stanovoï, as he was by Larchoff; both have been pursuing him unrelentingly ever since my mother's death, trying to entrap him into something that would give them a hold upon him; they have plotted late and early to convict him of proselytizing, of being connected with the revolutionists. It was only the fear of my father's influence at St. Petersburg that held them at all in check, or they would have sent him to Siberia or the gallows long since. The Stanovoï has seized on Larchoff's murder now to serve his hate

of the father, and they will buy witnesses to swear to his guilt."

"We will outbid them; we will do it if it costs every ruble in our possession and every acre of our land," cried Basil, coming up to her, both his hands clinched, his countenance set.

"If papa were at home!" exclaimed Sibyl, excitedly.

"Thank Heaven he is not!" retorted Basil. "He will serve us infinitely better at St. Petersburg. I must go to him immediately. We will do what is to be done there, and then my father will come home and deal with the business here."

"Dear Basil, that is the best plan. But meantime they will have carried Father Christopher to prison at X. Do you think the Stanovoï will let you see him at the guard-house before he goes? It would be everything if you could see him and tell him to be of good cheer."

"He is sure to be that, whatever befalls. I don't think they would let me see him."

"Oh, try, Basil, try!" said Narka, in a tone of entreaty that was full of anguish. "Or if I went? Perhaps they would make less difficulty about letting me in?"

Basil seemed pulled in different directions; but after a moment's hesitation he said, "I will go myself," and went out of the room.

"Would my going help?" asked M. de Beaucrillon.

"No; it would hinder, more likely," said Sibyl. "Oh, Narka," she cried, moving rapidly to and fro and wringing her hands, "if they should find witnesses to swear away his life!" She burst into tears.

"They are sure to find them," Narka replied, in a level undertone.

Sibyl knew what a strength of passionate feeling there was beneath the tense, calm manner, but M. de Beaucril-

lon did not, and the girl's apparent insensibility revolted him.

The Stanovoï politely but positively refused to let Basil see the father. He was profuse in his expressions of regret at not being able to obey his Excellency's desire, but he had himself received the strictest orders not to let any one near the prisoner, who was to be conveyed next day to X.

"And who has invented this precious lie against him?"

"Prince, I am here again under orders of secrecy, and dare not reveal the names of the witnesses."

"There are several, then? I should not have thought there was one man in the entire district who would have lied against Father Christopher."

"There is not a man in the district, Excellency, who does not know that Father Christopher hated Count Larchoff."

"There is not a man, woman, or child in the district who did not hate Larchoff. If that be a proof, you can convict every muzhik on the land of the murder."

"We can't convict them of a more heinous crime still, that of poisoning the souls of the Czar's subjects by drawing them away from the orthodox faith, as Father Christopher has been of late years repeatedly charged with doing."

"By whom was he charged with it? By Larchoff, who never could prove it in a single instance."

"It will be proved now."

"What! Is Larchoff coming back from hell to do it? Mind what you are about. I warn you the devil may overshoot his mark."

With this threat, emphasized by his uplifted stick, Basil turned his back on the Stanovoï and walked out.

Ivan Gorff had seen him in the distance, and was waiting outside the Mayor's house. They clasped hands.

"This is a pretty business," said Ivan.

"Whose doing can it be?" said Basil, as if questioning himself.

"You don't believe it can have been accidental?"

"I mean this arrest of Father Christopher."

"The Stanovoï's, of course. Who else had any interest in getting him out of the way? But the Prince will be too strong for him. There is no likelihood of their prevailing against the Prince?"

"There's always a likelihood of lies prevailing."

They went on some way without further speech. Ivan saw that Basil was desperately alarmed, and though he thought he overestimated the danger to Father Christopher, he knew his friend too well to say so, at this crisis at least. Basil was by nature and habit masterful and impatient of opposition; to contradict him would only serve to exasperate his imperious temper, and provoke one of those outbursts of violence which betrayed the weak point in his character, the lack of that strength which controls self, and is the surest test of power in controlling others.

So Ivan walked on, his loose, shuffling step keeping pace irregularly with the vigorous stride of his companion. When they reached the park gate, he stood. "I won't go in with you," he said; "I have to go on to X. this afternoon. Sophie is very ill."

"Oh! I'm very sorry to hear that," said Basil, cordially. "I hope it's only the effect of the shock to her nerves?"

"The doctor says so; but he says she is on the brink of a nervous fever. I must take her for a change as soon as possible. I think I shall carry her off to

Odessa in a day or two. We have an old aunt there who will take care of her. She wants to be taken care of."

"She does," replied Basil. "They all do, those young girls; they ought all to have mothers to look after them. Well, present my best respects to Mademoiselle Sophie. She may have left before I return. By-the-way, I did not tell you: I am going to start off to St. Petersburg. Nobody must know; I will say I am going to the dentist at X., and that I may be obliged to stay the night there. This will give me forty-eight hours' start of these blood-hounds. A good deal depends on our being first in the field at St. Petersburg. It is a mercy my father has kept his footing at court. We have grumbled because he squandered so much money there, but now we are thankful for it."

"Yes, it is an ill wind that blows nobody good," replied Ivan.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE doctor found Marguerite alarmingly feverish; she seemed on the brink of a serious illness; for some days he could not say how it would turn. Narka longed to take possession of her, to be quite alone with her. If delirium came on, there was the danger of revelations which both she and Marguerite dreaded. The consciousness of a secret between them—a terrible fear, which, for being unexpressed, was none the less distinctly understood by both—had suddenly drawn the two girls together in a bond of no common sympathy, and Marguerite would have been happier to feel herself in Narka's safe-keeping; but Sibyl had at once entered on the duties of nurse as hers by right, and was constantly by her bedside.

Narka had not been alone with Basil for a moment since the announcement of the murder, and she had not even seen him since the news of Father Christopher's arrest. Of late her relationship with Basil had been undergoing a change. Imperceptibly the old free unconsciousness had been slipping from her, and she had felt creeping over her that kind of embarrassing sensitiveness that manifests itself in shyness; she felt, or she fancied, that her manner was not the same—free, direct, and simple—and the dread that Basil should notice the change made her shrink from being alone with him. But Basil noticed nothing. He was as unrestrained as ever in his brotherly familiarity. It had long been his habit to make a confidante—to a certain point—of

Narka. He talked to her more unreservedly than to any one else. He could denounce things to Narka, he could swear at the Czar, he could complain of his father's extravagance and absenteeism, more freely to her than to Sibyl; he had been thrown more entirely on Narka for this kind of sympathy since Sibyl's marriage, and he had been annoyed lately at the difficulty he found in getting hold of her for confidential talks; she seemed to be always taken up with Sibyl, busy about something; but it never occurred to him that she was fighting shy of him.

This morning Narka had been wanting to meet him; she dreaded the interview, but some force was impelling her to seek it; she felt that she and Basil were in closer affinity at this moment than they had ever been before —drawn into closer confidence than they had ever been in childhood, when every little joy and sorrow was common, when they bent over the same lesson, and conned the same story, and wandered together through the forest birdnesting; whatever spell might come between them, it was to her that Basil was looking now for sympathy, and that silent understanding which was as necessary to his morbid sensitiveness as food to his body. She had been up and down stairs a dozen times within an hour, now fancying that she heard his steps ringing across the hall, then that she heard the door of his room close or open; her heart leaped every time she thought he was going to appear, and sank again when the hope, or the dread, she could hardly say which, died away. She was crossing the broad landing at the head of the wide oaken stairs when Basil did finally appear in the hall below, and, seeing her, turned from his purpose of entering the drawing-room, and bounded up the stairs.

"It was just you that I wanted to see," he said.

"Come in here a minute." He opened the door of his room, the room he was pleased to call his study, and Narka went in with him. He closed the door, and then turned to her. "What is the matter with Marguerite?" he said.

Narka could hardly believe her ears: the question was like a glass of cold water dashed into her face.

"The doctor says her nerves have received a shock."

"We did not want him to tell us that," Basil retorted, impatiently. "Does he say it is likely to be serious?"

"He hopes not; but she must be kept very quiet. Sibyl is with her."

Basil turned brusquely away and walked to the window.

So this was what was uppermost in *his* thoughts, this was *his* paramount preoccupation when they were all waiting with bated breath to know the fate of Father Christopher, charged with a crime that was punishable by death!

Basil came back as brusquely as he had turned away.

"Narka, there is no time to be lost. I am going to start at once for St. Petersburg. No one must know it except ourselves. Ivan is the only person I have told."

"Ah!.... Ivan is sure to be discreet," said Narka, with an imperceptible note of interrogation in her voice.

"Ivan discreet? Where I am concerned? Ivan would be flayed alive to save me from a toothache. You and Sibyl don't do Ivan justice; he is the best fellow living. I wish you would both try and like him better."

"We do like him," said Narka; "and I know he is devoted to you; but when secrecy is such a matter of life and death one dreads the very grass hearing.... I didn't mean to doubt his loyalty. What hour do you leave? Have you ordered the britzska?"

"No. I will make Vasili pack up what I want to take with me, and then order it." He put out his hand to the bell.

"Don't ring," said Narka, arresting him; "I will put up your things."

The door of his bedroom adjoined his study, and stood open; she passed in, and proceeded with sisterly indiscretion to open the drawers and fill the travelling valise that was always ready to hand for these sudden emergencies. Departures for distant journeys at a moment's notice were so common an incident in Basil's practice that his present expedition would probably have excited no surprise either in the castle or the village; it was conscience that was making a coward of him. He made no demur to Narka's offer, but went to his writing-table and began putting away and destroying some letters and papers.

Presently he came into the bedroom, and standing over Narka, who was on her knees laboring at the valise, he said: "You were down in the village this morning; what do they say? Do they think it was an accident?"

"No, they don't," she answered, without looking up.

"Do they suspect who did it?"

"I did not hear; but if they knew, the secret would be safe with them."

"What! even if they believed it to have been deliberate murder?"

"They don't call it murder, I imagine. They had come to look on Larchoff as more dangerous than any wild beast; his death is no more a murder to them than the killing of a wolf or a man-eating bear."

After a silence Basil said, "And you agree with them?"

Narka did not answer at once; she finished what she

was doing, and then stood up. "And if I did agree with them?" she said, her blue-black eyes flashing with the passion that vibrated in her voice—"if I did agree with them? Do you expect *me* to call down vengeance on the man who rid the world of Larchoff? If you do, you expect more than God in heaven expects of me."

Basil positively quailed before the strength of the passion that was making her tremble; yet he could not look away, or even drop his lids: her eyes held him with an irresistible fascination, and compelled his to meet them.

"You would acquit the man who committed that murder?" he asked.

"I would; I do. It is no murder in the sight of God."

"Would you—can you fancy a woman marrying the man who did it?" His voice dropped almost to a whisper.

"If she had loved him before, why not?"

"You think he might marry her, then, without confessing he had done it?"

"That would be harder to forgive, but if he loved her he would trust her love, and not fear to tell her the truth beforehand." Her voice had grown tremulous and soft as a caress.

Both were silent. There was a troubled consciousness in his eyes; in hers a wistful questioning. Basil was going to speak, but he checked himself and turned away. A few minutes later he was on the road to X.

Narka contrived to get possession of Marguerite next day. She owed this as much to M. de Beaucrillon as to her own manœuvring. He was bored to such an extent that it took all Sibyl's tact and ability to keep him quiet. She was almost sorry that Marguerite was not ill enough to frighten him a little. This would have been a stimulant, and kept him at least from yawning

all day long. But unfortunately for Sibyl he shrewdly suspected, what the doctor had said, that the best thing for Marguerite would be to carry her back at once to France. Poor Sibyl, with her hands full, had no time to spare in diverting him, but she contrived to make her many occupations help a little in that direction. There were scores of letters to be written, invited guests had to be put off, and all the preparations for the intended festivities to be countermanded, not temporarily, as she had thought when the murder had thrown a bombshell into the gay programme, but definitely. She begged Gaston to help her whenever French would do instead of Russian, and he was too well bred not to oblige a lady, though she was his wife. But these little services were as pebbles thrown into the water: they stirred its surface for a moment, but the ripples passed away, and left it as dead a calm as before.

"Ma chère amie," he protested, "the dulness of your native land is sublime. In no other country under heaven do people yawn as they do in Russia. The ennui is beyond any name in any language. I feel as if I were being chloroformed."

"Dear! oh dear! what an unreasonable being a man is!" Sibyl replied, with a sigh of despair. "In three weeks you have had a wolf come down and howl for you, then a murder, and you complain of being chloroformed!"

"These shocks wake one up with a start, but they don't keep one awake. There is absolutely nothing to do. If there were even a neighbor with a pretty wife to make love to, that would be wrong? Well, at any rate, it would be amusing; but I can't even try to make you jealous. Seigneur Dieu! what a country!"

Sibyl admitted it was a hard case, but she appealed to

his generosity, his kindness, to all his virtues in turn, and adjured him to be patient.

"I wish Basil had thought of taking Gaston with him," she said to Narka the third morning after her brother's departure. "It would have amused him to see St. Petersburg, and what a relief it would have been to us!"

"I should not care to give M. de Beaucrillon such an opportunity of comparing our criminal law with that of his own country," said Narka; "but now that you are a French woman you are not so sensitive in that respect as when you were a Russian."

"I wish, Narka, you would call Gaston by his Christian name," said Sibyl, with clever irrelevance; "it sounds ridiculous to hear you saying 'Monsieur de Beaucrillon.' If you had a husband I should call him by his name, and expect him to call me by mine."

Narka's face beamed with one of her rare beautiful smiles. She looked at Sibyl with a glance of adoring admiration.

"Yes," continued Sibyl, with a pretty pout, "you are a disappointment to me, both of you—a most unsatisfactory pair of brother and sister."

The grace of the reproach was one of those delicate touches with which Sibyl was continually thrilling Narka's tenderness to the heart. Yet these touches in some indescribable way brought home to her, as no external conditions of rank could do, the wide gulf which the accident of birth and race had sunk between them, and which Sibyl, with instinctive delicacy, bridged over, always seeming unconscious of any social difference between herself and her low-born sister.

During these days of dreary ennui to Gaston and breathless anxiety to the other members of the family,

Narka was on the watch to avoid being alone with Sibyl. Her own constant attendance on Marguerite and Sibyl's multitude of occupations made this comparatively easy, but occasionally they were thrown together *en tête-à-tête* for a little while, and then, let Narka do what she would, the conversation fell on the murder.

Sibyl would not admit for a moment that the crime could be fastened on Father Christopher.

"I wonder what Ivan Gorff thinks about it?" she said one morning when M. de Beaucrillon had left the breakfast table. "He ought to be back now. I wonder how Sophie is? I am sorry he carried her off in such a hurry, without letting us know she was so ill. I should have liked to see her; but I fancy they have been both a little shy with us all here since that kind of overture of my father's about Sophie which Basil did not follow up. It was a mistake his speaking so soon. Not that I think there was really much likelihood of Basil ever making up his mind to ask Sophie. What a mercy my father is on the spot to work against the people here! We shall never complain again of his being such an absentee. It is everything now his being well at court."

"Yes; if that obtains justice for Father Christopher, we need never complain," assented Narka; "but, Sibyl, what a heinous thing it is that the life of an innocent man should hang on such a chance!"

"It is never a chance when we can reach the Emperor," Sibyl replied; "that is the happiness of being under one whose authority is supreme; there is no twisting of the law, no plotting or bribing, that can overrule his will."

"But if one can't reach him in time, there is no redress against the plotting and the bribing."

Sibyl remembered how bitterly Narka had learned this evil side of the Emperor's paternal government, and re-

gretted her inconsiderate remark. M. de Beaucrillon's entrance was opportune to them both. Narka left him to Sibyl, and went up to Marguerite. The feverish symptoms had entirely disappeared, but bright little Marguerite was as weak as a child, and looked more wan and worn than so short an illness seemed to justify. The few days' suffering had beautified her, as such accidents are apt to do in early youth; her complexion was as clear as wax, and her brown eyes had borrowed a soft lustre that was more fascinating in its way than their usual saucy brightness. Poor child! no wonder the brightness was veiled! those innocent eyes had been gazing through wide-open summer windows at the joyous pageant of life, and lo! there suddenly passed before her a spectacle of horror, a vision of sin and murder. Narka continued to devote herself to Marguerite, though there was now no necessity for constant attendance. No confidences had passed between them, but she felt that Marguerite was clinging to her as the sinking man clings to the swimmer.

"Sibyl was saying she thought you might venture on a little drive to-day, dear?" remarked Narka.

"Oh no; I don't feel up to it," Marguerite replied; "my head swims still when I walk across the room; to-morrow perhaps I shall feel inclined, but not to-day."

Narka stood looking down at the small figure reclining on the couch; it looked half as small again, swallowed up under an enormous fur rug.

"I will let you have your way about it this once more," she said; "but it is the last time. To-morrow, if you won't come of your own sweet will, I will get M. de Beaucrillon to carry you. You will never get a bit of strength, or a patch of color into your cheeks, until you get some fresh air."

"The color will come back soon enough, don't be afraid," Marguerite said, with a little pretence at merriment. "Are you going to drive?"

"No; I am going to walk; I am going down to my mother for an hour."

"That dear Tante Nathalie; when shall I see her?" said Marguerite, taking Narka's hand that hung down by her side. "How good it is of her to spare you to us so long! You have been nursing me when you ought to have been with her. How she must miss you!"

"Dear mother"—Narka's eyes grew tender in an instant—"but she is glad to let me be with Sibyl."

"You do love Sibyl."

"Yes, I do love Sibyl," Narka answered, with hearty emphasis.

Marguerite felt at that moment that she loved Narka. Something in the expression of her uplifted face, perhaps, expressed this avowal, for Narka bent down and kissed her on the forehead.

At the park gate Narka met Ivan Gorff. "I thought you were gone to Odessa?" she said, in surprise.

"I have come back on purpose to see you. I have something of importance to tell you."

"Ah! about the father?"

"No; about Basil. He must escape across the frontier as quickly as possible."

Narka stood, partly from sheer inability to go on walking, and partly that she might look at Ivan, and read in his face what she had not the courage to ask.

Ivan stood also, but he only repeated: "He must escape at once. I have sent a messenger on the chance of meeting him at St. Petersburg, but I expect he is on his way home by this, and the messenger will miss him. Perhaps it is as well; there will be less hurry in arresting

him here. They will have to be cautious, and catch him quietly."

"What has happened?" Narka said, when she had recovered her self-command sufficiently to speak and walk on.

"Something has been found amongst Larchoff's papers that compromises him; he is denounced as implicated in a plot to assassinate the Emperor."

Narka uttered something inarticulate. "I must not ask how you came by this knowledge?" she said.

"You may ask, but I may not tell," he replied, curtly.

"The warrant is not yet here for his arrest?"

"No; but it will probably be here to-night. When do you expect Basil?"

"At any moment. He has not announced the day, but I have an idea he will be back to-morrow."

They went on a little without speaking. Then Narka said: "And Father Christopher? Have you heard anything? Is there any chance of Basil bringing back the order for his release?"

Ivan was shuffling on with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his furred overcoat. At this question of Narka's he lifted his head, held it skyward a moment, and then dropped it heavily on his breast; the gesture expressed absolute hopelessness.

"Yet the Prince has great influence? Sibyl seems certain he will prevail."

But Ivan remained stolidly unresponsive, while a look as of impatient contempt crossed his face.

"Oh, surely something may be done!" Narka cried. "Is there nothing to be attempted here? Would not the people come with us in a body to X., and petition the Isprawnic? Sibyl would come at our head. Or perhaps M. de Beaucrillon, as a foreigner, might have

a chance of being heard if he interfered. To think that we should stand by and not lift a finger to rescue the dear old father is too horrible!"

Ivan walked on, his eyes still staring before him. At last he said, "There is only one thing that could be of the least use—if we could find the man who committed the murder, and give him up to justice."

Narka felt as if some one had clutched her by the throat. The ground seemed to be moving under her feet. She kept walking on as if urged by some mechanical force. For her life she could not have stopped; if she had stopped, she must have screamed. Neither of them spoke another word until they came to a point where the roads crossed. Then Narka said, "I am going this way."

Ivan took the remark for a dismissal, and without further ceremony parted from her, going on to the village, while she took the road to X.

## CHAPTER VII.

Narka was no longer in a mood to go to her mother after this. It would have been impossible to keep the absolute secrecy that was necessary; she could command the silence of her tongue—that was always easy to her—but she could not insure the silence of her face, nor prevent the keen eyes of the mother from reading on its troubled features the fact that something was agitating her. Many a time within the last few days Narka had felt thankful that she was staying at the castle, and that Marguerite's illness gave her a plausible excuse for not going home to be with Madame Larik during her little attack of rheumatism. It would have been almost beyond her powers of self-control to sit all day with a calm countenance, cheering up her mother, reassuring her perpetual apprehensions, answering her endless conjectures, contradicting her prophecies, and belying in words the terrors that filled her own heart. It would often have been a relief at this moment—an unspeakable relief—if she could have spoken out to anybody, to an idiot, to a dumb dog, to any living thing; it would have been a relief if she could have shrieked out to the trees; but she might not indulge even in this solace; there were peasants about in the fields; they would hear her, and think she had gone suddenly mad.

She walked on at a quick pace, and had gone some way on the road, when there broke on the stillness the sound of bells tinkling in the distance. Narka stood still and listened till she heard them nearing distinctly. Could

it be Basil returning? She held her breath in expectation; but the suspense did not last long. There came quickly in sight a britzska, in which she recognized the Prince's notary, M. Perrow. He pulled up the moment he saw her, and jumping out, advanced with a low bow. The bow was so low that it set Narka wondering.

"This is a lucky chance for me, mademoiselle," said the notary, again bowing. "I came in to seek the honor of an interview with you. May I join you now, or shall I accompany you to Madame Larik's house?"

"My mother is not very well; I prefer to talk with you here," replied Narka, her surprise increasing to amazement.

"It is not often one has the good fortune to be the bearer of good news," began M. Perrow, facetiously, "and I congratulate myself on being so privileged."

"Good news! Oh, thank God!" cried Narka; "he is out? he is free?"

"Excuse me: my news has nothing to do with that sad business. I come to announce the death of your mother's respected relative Dr. Schwartzel, and to inform you that he has bequeathed to you, to you personally and solely, a legacy of fifty thousand rubles. The money has been paid into our hands."

Narka said "Oh!" and walked on.

"We are so full of this dreadful business," she observed, presently, "that it seems as if nothing important could happen except in connection with it."

"That's natural. Still, life goes on, and it is a good thing to inherit. The money was paid in only this morning by the banker of the late Dr. Schwartzel: you see, I have lost no time in letting you know."

"I thank you."

"It is desirable that the money should be invested

without delay. The sooner it is placed, the sooner it will bring in interest. I wait your orders on this head." And he forthwith launched into a statement of the various kinds of stock, home and foreign, that he ventured to recommend as safe and profitable.

Narka let him run on, but she hardly heard what he was saying; she was not in a frame of mind to enter on the subject of railways that paid high with risk, and government bonds that paid low without risk. She requested M. Perrow to let the money remain in his safe for a few days, until she should have considered the matter and taken advice, when she would communicate with him The notary was a trifle disappointed, but he felt that Mademoiselle Narka Larik was a person who knew how to assume at once the new position in which her suddenly acquired fortune placed her, and this inspired him with additional respect for her. He took his dismissal with politeness, got into his britzska, and drove away.

Narka watched the britzska out of sight, and it almost seemed as if its coming and going had been a dream. A week ago this legacy would have been the realization of the cherished dream of her life; it would have represented the fulfilment of all that her poor mother had longed for—independence for her child, and comfort and ease for them both. They had wanted for nothing, thanks to Prince Zorokoff's generosity and Sibyl's loving-kindness, but both mother and daughter had a spirit that chafed under the burden of such obligations, and to be free from these, to be independent of pecuniary help, was their greatest desire. Then Narka longed to take her mother to those healing springs in her native Germany, and after that to travel and see some of the beautiful places that Basil told her about, and that her

own imagination had pictured to her out of books. The tragedy of her father's and her brother's death had fallen like a deadly blight on her youth, and crushed the natural desire of her age for amusement. She had never shared the common delight of girlhood in innocent gayety and dress and dancing; those springs were broken; but perhaps on that very account her desire for other enjoyments had developed more strongly. She longed to escape from the scenes of her life's great sorrow, as if this flight of the body must in some degree carry her spirit away from its pain; while the intellectual hunger of a healthy mind incited her curiosity to visit new places and see new phases of life. The long winter evenings had many and many a time been shortened to herself and her mother by dreams and plans that were to be carried out when old Cousin Schwartzel died and left them the independence he had promised on hearing of Larik's exile and their consequent destitution. And now the promise had been fulfilled, the fairy had come to their door with the purse and the seven-leagued boots, and Narka could not even feel glad. If the money could serve to rescue Father Christopher and get Basil safe out of Russia, how joyfully would she have paid it away, and renounced her day-dreams forever!

She had walked a long way—so long, that even her elastic young limbs recalled her to the fact that they had to carry her back. She made up her mind not to announce the news to Madame Larik to-day. She was not sufficiently mistress of herself to play the rejoicing part that would be expected of her; moreover, in her mother's weak condition of health, another sudden shock, even a pleasant one, might be hurtful; and there was no hurry; the good news would be as good to-morrow. She was debating whether she would go in to her mother

now or come down later in the afternoon, when the sight of Sibyl's pony-carriage at the cottage gate settled the question, and she went in.

In Narka's eyes there was no lovelier thing in nature than the picture of Sibyl with Tante Nathalie, as Madame Larik was called in the family. When she entered the room now the young Princess was administering to the widow some little dainty that she had brought from the castle, and insisted on making her eat. Madame Larik yielded under protest, querulously declaring between every spoonful that she had no appetite, and that there was no reason why she should force herself to eat, or to live at all. Sibyl petted her as if she had been a child; her manner was as full of gentle deference toward the peevish, forlorn widow as if she had been a Czarina. Madame Larik had been pretty in her youth, with that soft round German comeliness that wears better than more regular beauty; she was a soft, fair, fat, round little woman, with nothing to remind you of Narka's grand lines or delicate splendor of coloring; but there was no lack of intelligence in her features, and the majesty of a great sorrow had set its seal upon her.

"Tante Nathalie is a great deal better to-day," said Sibyl, when Narka came in. "She won't own it; but that is sheer perversity, I tell her. Now, ma tante, you must let me put you lying down," she continued, seeing that Madame Larik had eaten the last spoonful of her little dainty meal.

"I am well enough sitting so, my dear," said the widow.

But Sibyl insisted. She had a notion that to make people lie down *must* be good for them.

Madame Larik gave in, as she always did with Princess Sibyl.

"We must get her out for a drive to-morrow," said Sibyl, fussing fondly about her, and putting a quilted silk eider-down—her own gift—over Tante Nathalie's feet.

"No, no," protested Madame Larik, shaking her head. "No driving about for me while Father Christopher is in prison. Wait till he is out."

"Your moping and worrying won't help him to get out," said Sibyl.

"That is what I tell her," said Narka, standing at the end of the sofa.

"Why does not Basil write? It is a bad sign that he does not write," said Madame Larik. "It must mean bad news."

"It means more likely no news," said Sibyl. "But in any case he would not have trusted the news to the post; he said so."

"If he had good news he would have managed to send it somehow," persisted Madame Larik, in her little soft, obstinate way, shaking her head. "Good news is sure to come."

"I thought it was bad news that always travelled fast," Sibyl said, laughing at her. "Why will you croak so, Tante Nathalie?"

She took a vase off the table, and began to arrange some hot-house flowers in it, talking in her pleasant, sympathetic way all the time. Then she said she must be going, and Narka had better come with her. Narka made no difficulty. She was thankful to escape the strain of a *tête-à-tête* with her mother.

## CHAPTER VIII.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of the sixth day after Basil's departure; the lamps had just been lighted; M. de Beaucrillon, Sibyl, and Narka were in the drawing-room. Suddenly a loud barking of the dogs announced some arrival, and before there was time to conjecture who it might be, the door opened, and Basil walked in. Sibyl ran to embrace him, and the others greeted him with glad eagerness. After the excitement of the meeting was over, Sibyl said:

"And Father Christopher? Have you succeeded?"

"Yes; the warrant for his release was signed the day I left."

An exclamation of deep thankfulness came from all.

"Did you see him on your way through X.?" asked Sibyl.

"I did. But don't let us begin to talk about that yet," he said, letting himself fall into a chair. "I'm too dead beat."

The light fell full on his face, and they were all struck by its haggard expression. The air of utter exhaustion he wore was scarcely to be accounted for, at his age, by a hurried journey to and from St. Petersburg.

Sibyl bent over him, and kissed his forehead.

"You must want some food, dear Basil," she said. "What shall I order? Tea?"

"Nonsense—tea!" said M. de Beaucrillon. "Give him some strong bouillon and a bottle of good old Bordeaux."

"That would suit my condition better," said Basil, "though a cup of tea would not be amiss either, if it were ready."

"It will be ready in a moment," said Sibyl. "Ring the bell, Gaston." Then, as if too impatient to wait for the summons to be answered, she went quickly out of the room herself.

Beyond a mutual greeting when they clasped hands, Basil and Narka had not exchanged a word, and yet each was conscious of being intently observant of the other.

"How is Marguerite?" Basil inquired, suddenly.

"Oh, she is nearly all right," replied M. de Beaucrillon.

"I will go and tell the good news," said Narka. "She will be overjoyed."

"Why should I not go and take it to her? I want to see how she is," said Basil. He stood up, but it seemed an effort to him. He looked like a man utterly spent with fatigue.

"Mon chèr," said his brother-in-law, "take my advice and go up to your own room and take a bath. That will refresh you more than anything, to begin with."

"M. de Beaucrillon is right," said Narka; "you will have a better appetite too, when you are rested a bit." She said this to give Basil the chance of getting away and being alone with her for a moment. She had a terrible piece of news to communicate to him, and the sight of his weariness, which seemed as much mental as physical, pained her to the heart, and made what she had to say harder even than she had expected.

Basil consented to take his brother-in-law's advice, and followed Narka leisurely out of the drawing-room. She was on the landing at the head of the stairs, when he made a sign that he wanted to speak to her.

They both entered the study together. Basil went straight to his desk, unlocked it, and took out a bundle of letters.

"I want you to keep these for me," he said; "but I won't give them to you unless you are certain that you can secrete them beyond any chance of discovery."

"You may give them to me," Narka replied. And he gave them to her.

Nothing more was said: they knew that one was offering and the other accepting a trust which involved terrible possibilities to both.

"And now I have something else to tell you," Basil said. "They have trapped me; a warrant is out for my arrest."

"Ah! you know!" Narka exclaimed, almost relieved at not having to break the news to him. "Ivan told me; but they have not caught you yet. There is time to escape."

"Escape is out of the question. The house is watched, and I have been followed all the way from X. I met the Stanovoï there, and he announced the good news to me."

"*He* told you about it? Then he offered you some alternative, some chance of escape?"

"He did; but I can't take advantage of it; I haven't got the money. Every available ruble has been raised for Father Christopher's ransom. I called at Ivan's on my way here; but he is absent. That was my one chance, and I have missed it."

"What is the sum?" Narka said, a sudden hope making her heart leap.

"Fifty thousand rubles. And to be paid by nine o'clock to-night."

"Basil, I have got the money. Listen!" Her face

was flushed; her great eyes shone; her voice trembled with the palpitating joy that filled her as she hurriedly told him about the legacy. And now she had only to go into X. and fetch it. "Oh, what a blessed mercy that it came just in time! I will ride in at once; it is now half past four; a good horse will take me there and back in two hours and a half. There will be no delay; I will be here again by seven o'clock—in time for dinner. No one need know I have been absent. It will be quite easy; there is plenty of time."

She was turning away in a tremor of excitement when Basil arrested her.

"Narka," he said, laying his hand on her arm, "you are a noble-hearted friend; but do you think I am such a pitiful dog as to take this money from you?"

"What do you mean?" she said, looking at him in bewilderment. "Is it because it is mine that you would refuse it? Oh, Basil!"

There was a cry of pain in her voice as from a wounded creature; there was a confession too in it that betrayed the secret of her heart.

"I would take anything from you," he said, conscious of a slight shock and of a sudden burst of tenderness toward her; "but you can't give it to me without sacrificing yourself and your mother. Heaven knows when I could repay it. No, I can't be such a brute as to rob Tante Nathalie!"

"And you think it will be less brutal to kill me? Yes, it will kill me if they arrest you, for I know, and so do you, what will happen, once you are in their hands. My mother knows nothing about this money; she need never know until you can give it back to us. Oh, Basil! Basil! don't refuse me; it will kill me if you do!" Her voice broke, her eyes were raised to his, brim-

ful of tears, and saying as plainly as ever eyes of woman spoke, "I love you!"

Basil was moved to the core of his heart. He forgot that he was Prince Zorokoff, and that Narka was a low-born Jewess; he forgot everything except that this beautiful girl loved him, and was offering her all to save him.

He opened wide his arms. "Narka!"

With a sob she sank into his embrace. For one long moment he held her clasped. Then lifting her head from his shoulder, "Yes, I will take this money from you," he said; "but only on one condition: will you give me yourself with it? Have you the courage to be my wife?"

"I should give my life for you," she answered.

He kissed her on the lips.

"Basil," she said, "I have loved you all my life."

"Dearest, and so have I loved you."

And he spoke the truth, but with a difference.

"I must be going," she said, struggling away from him, but he tightened one arm round her.

"Wait a moment. We must pledge our betrothal first." Drawing her toward a table, he unlocked a drawer and took out a diamond ring, a hoop of several beautiful stones. "This was my mother's betrothal ring," he said, slipping it on her finger. "Wear it till you come back from X.; then let it hang as an amulet round your neck until I can place it on your finger before all the world."

"May Sibyl not know?" she asked, with timid hesitation.

"No; let it remain a secret between ourselves until we meet. It will be another secret binding us together."

He was alluding to the ransom she was giving him; but Narka grew pale.

"Yes," she said, almost under her breath, "it will be another bond between us."

He kissed her again, and she hurried away, carrying with her the packet of letters he had intrusted to her.

Basil went to Marguerite's door and knocked; but getting no answer, he went down to the dining-room. Sibyl was there waiting for him, and sat with him while he partook of the meal that had been hastily ordered up. Basil was only four-and-twenty, and he was in rude health, and no amount of mental trouble could destroy his appetite, or take away the natural cravings of hunger.

Sibyl saw that he was too tired yet to care to talk much, so she busied herself helping him to good things, and kept up a lively flow of monologue, telling him all that had happened since his departure, the excitement in the village, Marguerite's illness, everything that could interest him and save him the trouble of answering further than by an occasional remark or question.

But while Basil was listening to Sibyl, his thoughts were elsewhere. He was in a strange state of mind and feeling. It seemed to him as if he had suddenly become another person, as if a new Basil had been added to the old one. He hardly realized yet what he had done, or what was to come of it. He had made a tremendous leap in the dark, and he was wondering where it had landed him. He had taken a step which must change the whole aspect and current of his life. He had done it without a moment's premeditation, on the spur of a sudden impulse of—passion, was it? or generous gratitude? He was not calm enough to analyze his own heart at this crisis, or balance nicely the conflicting forces which had moved him to ask Narka to be his wife. And what would Sibyl say? She loved Narka dearly, as dearly as if they had been sisters in flesh and blood; but this per-

sonal fondness was quite compatible with invincible repugnance to Narka as a sister-in-law; Sibyl's soft grace of manner was so entirely free from *morgue* as to lead her inferiors to believe she was altogether unconscious of any superiority toward them; but beneath this outward suavity there existed a spirit of family pride that was hard as flint and strong to fanaticism. How would she take the announcement that a Jewish trader's daughter was going to queen it over her as Princess Zorokoff, the head of the family?

This was not the only problem that was vexing Basil's soul while he ate his caviare and salad. The image of Marguerite kept forcing itself before his eyes with a persistency that was unwarrantably troublesome. He had long since recognized in his little French cousin a creature of a different mould from any that he had ever met; the charm of her brightness, her happy spirit, her child-like freshness of heart, had been working on him like a spell. He had been aware of this, and had not attempted to resist the influence; he knew that it was Sibyl's cherished dream that he should marry Marguerite, and he had been only held back from pursuing it by the fear that he had entangled himself in political engagements from which it would be cowardly and unfaithful to break loose. Still he had been in a dreamy, delicious way caressing possibilities, and it had struck him more than once that Marguerite would not have repulsed him. He was not vainer than most men, but he could not help seeing that she changed color sometimes under his glance, and that her saucy, wistful eyes took a softer, a more timid expression when they met his; he had noted these signs with a pleasant sense of power unchecked by any scruples or remorse, for he had the consciousness of being quite willing, and he sus-

pected able, to heal any wound he might make in her innocent young heart. But now he saw things differently. His conscience smote him; he felt a pang at the thought of having perhaps involuntarily inflicted one on her. He longed to see her; he must see her once again. It would be with very different feelings now from those with which he would have met her an hour ago; but he thought of Narka, of her ripe, glowing beauty, her tender, self-sacrificing love, and he would not let himself by so much as a passing sigh be unfaithful to the loyalty he had sworn to her.

Marguerite was in the drawing-room when he returned there with Sibyl. The meeting was much less awkward than Basil had feared. It was natural that he should be affectionately interested in his cousin, who looked still pale enough to warrant Sibyl's reproach that she had been tiring herself by writing letters.

"You must let me put you lying down, chérie," Sibyl said, "and Basil will tell us all about his journey while you are resting."

But Basil protested regretfully that he could not enjoy this relief of sitting quietly and talking to them. He must go and tell Ivan Gorff the good news before he could enjoy anything.

"We will send for him to come up and hear it," suggested Sibyl.

"No, no; I must take it to him myself," Basil replied, with a touch of impatience that silenced her. Ivan was a pretext for going to the Stanovoï to inform him that the money would be forth-coming. Basil could not tell Sibyl that he was under warrant of arrest; he felt unequal to the effort of having to console her, and, besides, he was not yet certain of being able to ransom himself. Narka might have some delay, the notary might

be out, the key of his strong-box might not be forthcoming at once, an accident might have happened; who could tell? When luck is against a man, he must reckon with bad chances.

M. de Beaucrillon offered to accompany his brother-in-law, but Basil said that as Sophie was ill, Ivan might not be disposed to receive a visit. It was rather a lame excuse, but M. de Beaucrillon understood, as Sibyl did, that he wished to see Ivan alone, and did not press his company upon him. It was natural enough, Gaston said to himself, that, under the circumstances, Basil should fight shy of a Frenchman; the latter rather admired him for being ashamed of having a foreigner witness the way his country was governed. Poor fellow, he looked piteously worn, Gaston thought, as he noticed his sunken eyes and haggard, unkempt air, like that of a man who has not slept for nights.

Ivan was not at home, as Basil, who had met him at X., knew, but the Stanovoï was. He asked no questions. So long as he got his money, he did not care where it came from. He assumed that the French brother-in-law had come down with it; in fact, he had reckoned on this when he named so exorbitant a figure. The Zorokoffs were wealthy, but ready money was scarce at Yrakow; it all went to St. Petersburg, where the Prince made it fly as fast as he got it. The castle kept itself; there was plenty on the property of all that was wanted, and what the property did not provide was done without. The result was that odd mixture of lavish abundance and uncivilized discomfort, traces of which were even still visible in certain details, notwithstanding Sibyl's presence and the reign of orderly splendor that she brought with her.

The interview with the Stanovoï was short. Basil

had nothing else to do in the village, and nowhere else to go, and two hours must yet elapse before Narka returned, giving all chances favorable. He could not bring himself to go back to the house and spend the interval with Marguerite and the others. The effort of deceiving them, and keeping the secret that was holding his very life in suspense, was more than he felt equal to. In another hour he would go back and quietly put up the few things he wanted to take with him.

The night had closed in, and the moon had not risen, so it was nearly pitch-dark. Basil paced along the road, ruminating in bitter perplexity of spirit. Suddenly Peter, his dog, gave a low growl, and then an angry bark, as if warning off an enemy close at hand. Basil had no doubt but that some agent of the Stanovoï's was watching him. He struck a match, and looked at his watch. Narka had been nearly an hour and a half gone. It was time he went home, and got ready to start, assuming that he was to do so. He turned back, walking quickly, for the air was frosty, and his breath made a cloud before him as he went. Suddenly the moon rose, and a few stars sprang out in attendance, and the road, black a moment before, was filled with light. On one side there was a copse, toward which Peter's ill-will was directed, judging from the way he growled at it now and then. Basil, following the dog's indication, kept looking that way; the outer trees threw a tracery of shadow and sheen on the ground, but farther back it was all a chaos of stems; presently his eyes, sharpened by presentiment, descried the figure of a man stealing along through the woods. Basil was quite certain that he had been watched since he left X., but the sight of this spy, dogging him in the dark, made him realize the fact with a shock, and it seemed also to bring more viv-

idly before him the nearness of the peril on the brink of which he stood. If Narka should be late, or fail in her errand—

How slowly the time dragged on! He quickened his step; his foot-fall rang sharp and clear on the hard road. Peter trotted on, and ceased to growl. Suddenly he stood, tail and ears up-pricked; then with a loud bark turned and dashed back down the road. Basil turned too, and listened. Was that the sound of galloping hoofs that he heard? Could it be Narka? He stopped smoking, he almost stopped breathing, as the sound drew nearer. Peter was barking violently, joyously. The horse came in sight. It was Narka. Basil stepped into the middle of the road, where the brilliant moonlight shone unobstructed by a shadow, and waved his hand. She pulled up, and in a moment he was beside her.

"Here it is," she said, in a cautious tone, stooping over him. "I will ride on, and leave this poor beast at the stables, and wait for you in the court." She unclasped the heavy bag that was fastened round her waist, and Basil took it, and walked on rapidly after her.

On entering the outer court he ordered a groom to get ready a carriage with four stout horses. He then walked on into the second court; he was about to enter the house when some one stepped forward and said, "Does your Excellency want to speak to me?"

"Ah! it is you. Yes, I want to speak to you," Basil replied, with a short laugh. "Very considerate of you to turn up just at the right moment. Come in here, will you?"

The Stanovoï followed him into the house, and they entered a room close at hand. Basil struck a light. They were closeted for a few minutes—just long enough to count the money.

"Now, Excellency, depart with speed, and don't let the grass grow under your feet till you have passed the frontier."

The Stanovoï bowed low, and hugging his bag, went out.

Narka was waiting in the entry when Basil reappeared. The tawny flame of an oil lamp gave enough light to let them see each other. Basil caught her in his arms and kissed her again and again. Then, brusquely releasing her, he turned to ascend the stairs, and flew up to his room.

Narka, in a tumult of bliss and agitation, went up to hers. She was shaken to pieces by her mad ride; but there was no time to rest; there was no time to think. She must be ready to go to Basil before he went down-stairs, and say good-by to him alone before going through the ceremony of doing so in the drawing-room. She divested herself quickly of her riding-habit, and proceeded to attire herself in a dress of white cashmere that Basil admired; it was a fantastic garment of her own contrivance, made with much artistic effect, but quite regardless of fashion. She clasped a dead-gold band round her waist, and fastened a crimson rose in her hair, and with a great joy and a great terror in her heart went to seek Basil, but as she reached the broad landing on which his room opened she saw M. de Beaucrillon standing at the door. It was a terrible *contretemps;* there was nothing to be done, but she must go down-stairs, and trust to Basil managing to find a moment alone with her before he fled. She found Sibyl in the drawing-room.

"Well, you have seen Tante Nathalie?" exclaimed Sibyl, who had taken for granted that Narka had gone out with the good news to her mother. "She will come

out for a drive now, I hope? But oh, Narka, how ill Basil looks! Gaston says he has grown five years older this last week. What a time he staid with Ivan! He has only just come back, it seems."

"It has been a terrible week for all of us," Narka said, ignoring the last remarks. She was standing near a console, one hand resting on the porphyry slab; a large silver lamp high placed on a malachite pillar behind her threw its golden light over her soft white draperies, and made her hair shine like a nimbus. Perhaps the light of a deep and tender joy burning in her eyes and trembling on her full red lips touched her with its outward and visible glory, for Sibyl, who had been gazing in a comfortable ecstasy up at the gods and goddesses on the ceiling, glanced at her suddenly, and was struck by something in her aspect.

"Narka," she exclaimed, "you look like an archangel!"

"Never having seen an archangel," said M. de Beaucrillon, sauntering into the room, "I was mentally comparing mademoiselle to a vestal, or a Greek bride."

"Why Greek, mon chèr?" said Sibyl.

Narka blushed, and turned her large liquid glance smilingly on M. de Beaucrillon. It was not often he took the trouble to be complimentary, and being a woman and beautiful, she was pleased. But it was not selfish coquetry that made her feel that sudden thrill of exultation in her own beauty. She was proud of it for Basil's sake now.

Partly to escape from the embarrassment of standing to be admired, and partly from her natural impulse to give vent to her overwrought feelings in song, she moved to the piano, and sat down and began to warble a bridal song in Russian. The words were unintelligible to M. de Beaucrillon, but the pathos of the melody and the

penetrating sweetness of the voice moved him strangely. He said to himself, as he gazed and listened:

"What can Zorokoff be made of, that he has not fallen under the spell of such a creature?"

When the bridal song came to an end—quickly, for Narka was impatient to escape—he entreated her to sing it again. She could not refuse, and perhaps the impatience of her soul made her throw more fire of passion into the pathetic melody, for when it ceased M. de Beaucrillon was so overcome that he had not a word of thanks ready, but let her rise from the piano in silence.

"What can be keeping Marguerite so long, I wonder?" Narka remarked. "I must go and see;" and she walked slowly out of the room.

"And what can be keeping Basil?" said Sibyl. She was growing fidgety. "I think I must go and look after him."

"He was taking a bath when I knocked just now, Vasili told me," replied Gaston.

"Oh, then he will be here presently, no doubt;" and she sat down.

As she did so a valet came in with a letter, which he presented to her. It was in Basil's writing. Sibyl opened it with a cry and a start, and drew out a sealed envelop addressed to Father Christopher, and then a note that she read rapidly.

"Oh, my God! This is too dreadful!" she cried out.

M. de Beaucrillon snatched up the note. "Good heavens! Gone! Fled! Where have they taken him? To Siberia? My God! what a country to live in!" With a muttered expletive he threw down the letter, and proceeded to try and calm Sibyl, who had burst into hysterical grief.

Meantime Narka had gone and knocked at Basil's

door, and getting no answer, opened it. The room was empty. She called his name, but there was no response. In a flash of lightning she guessed the truth: he was gone. But where? Could the Stanovoï have played him false? She glanced round the rooms. The lights were burning, but there was nothing to give the least clew of why or how he had fled. Sick with terror, Narka took up a candle and went on to her own room. Perhaps he was there waiting for her. The room was empty, but on the table—a little round table with a green velvet cover on which there was a solitary book—lay a letter. At a glance she saw it was from Basil.

"My Narka,—I have not the courage to meet you again, since we have to part at once. Adieu, beloved. I will write when it is possible. I owe you my life. It is yours for all time. Basil."

Narka sank into a chair, clutching the note in her fingers. Gone! Without one more embrace! How could he? But the relief of knowing that he had escaped, that he had not been treacherously entrapped to his ruin, as she had feared for a moment, was so great that it helped her to forget the cruel disappointment. She recovered herself quickly, and remembered, with that strong sympathy for the suffering of others which was the noble side of her nature, that Sibyl and Marguerite would want to be sustained under this shock. Ah, Marguerite! Narka's heart went out to the child in a rush of purest pity. She rose and hurried to her room, but the news had got there before her. Marguerite was on her knees by the bed, her face buried in the eider-down, sobbing bitterly, so bitterly that she did not hear the door open, or Narka's step crossing the room; she

was only made aware of her entrance when Narka knelt down and took her in her arms and drew her head upon her breast. Marguerite gave herself up to the caress; it was pitiful and tender as ever one woman gave to another. Narka had guessed her secret, and it had fired her at first with a jealous fear that lay close upon hatred; but that was gone now, and she felt nothing but compassion; she could afford now to give her whole sympathy to the woman who loved Basil, and loved him hopelessly.

When the first paroxysm of tears had spent itself, Marguerite raised her head from Narka's shoulder, and they stood up together.

"Oh, Narka, it is terrible!" she said, struggling with the sobs that made her bosom heave. "If we only knew that he was safe!"

"He is safe, darling; that we may be certain of," said Narka.

"Oh, thank God! I only heard that he was gone; that Sibyl had a few words saying he had to fly. Where is he gone, do you know?"

"He is making for the frontier; and once beyond it, he will be out of danger."

Marguerite murmured something that was swallowed up in a great sob. After a moment she laid her hand on Narka's shoulder, and putting her lips close to her ear, "Tell me," she said in a whisper that was scarcely audible, "is it—is he only accused of politics, or is it—anything else, do you know?"

"They have accused him of nothing worse than of hating tyrants and of conspiring against them."

"Ah!" The exclamation sounded like a gasp of relief.

They were silent for a minute, standing close together,

Narka like a strong archangel, with her arm thrown protectingly round the small, child-like figure that was still shaken with sobs.

"Darling," said Narka, "you are too agitated to come down-stairs or see any one this evening. I will put you to bed, and say that you were not well."

Marguerite understood. She kissed Narka, and gave herself up like a child to be undressed and put to bed.

## CHAPTER IX.

M. DE BEAUCRILLON wanted to be off next morning. Sibyl had some difficulty in making him see that this was impossible. There was a multitude of things to be done, she urged—things that she alone could do. All the festivities and hospitalities had been countermanded and put off; but preparations for these had been made on the grandest scale, and this involved a large settling of accounts that no one else could attend to. Besides these reasons, Basil had enclosed to her in his own short note a letter for Father Christopher, which he desired she would hand him herself. Sibyl could not leave this commission unfulfilled; and, moreover, it was out of the question her going away without seeing Father Christopher, quite independently of other impediments. The Mayor, in answer to her inquiry whether they were to expect the father that day, sent word that no message had been received from X., but that it was not likely he would be set free before Monday, certain formalities having to be gone through before a prisoner was released, even after the receipt of the order to that effect.

"What confounded humbug!" said M. de Beaucrillon. "The brutes are just doing it in order to make me spend another Sunday in this place. Well, look here, Sibyl: I'll wait till Monday, but on Tuesday morning we start. There is a limit to what man can bear."

"My dear Gaston, the limit is very soon reached with you," said Sibyl.

"Just look at her!" Gaston said, appealing to Narka.

"Look at the state her eyes are in! The lids are so red and swollen that it is frightful to behold, and she looks about thirty! Your head is aching fit to split," he added, looking defiantly at his wife; "I know it is. You did not sleep an hour last night. Just look at yourself in the glass, and see what a complexion you have!"

There was something grotesque to Narka in the spectacle of M. de Beaucrillon standing before his wife, bewailing her swollen eyes and her damaged complexion, when such grievous anxiety was absorbing them all.

If Father Christopher did not arrive to-morrow, Saturday, it was likely enough they would retain him to keep the Sabbath day at X., and not let him free until Monday, as the Stanovoï suggested. M. de Beaucrillon made up his mind to the worst, and heroically faced the fact that he had three whole days to bear up under the deadly pall of the place. He was anxious, unselfishly anxious, on Marguerite's account, to be off. He could not but see that she was looking wretched.

"This place doesn't suit you, *petite perle*," he said, taking her chin between his fingers and thumb and imprinting a brotherly kiss on her forehead. "I wish we were back in France; if we had to spend another month here, you and Sibyl would be in your coffins. I should probably be in mine. This atmosphere of dramatic emotions, sudden arrests, and hair-breadth escapes, of cruelty and agonized despair, is enough to suffocate any man not to the manner born. I feel as if I were playing a subordinate and rather contemptible part in a tragedy. It is intolerable."

He remembered, however, that it was only to last three days longer, and took heart, lighted a cigar, and

went out for a ride. M. de Beaucrillon was the only person at Yrakow who rejoiced in the prospect of the approaching departure. To Narka it was a prospect of bitter pain. Parting with Sibyl was to her like parting with fire in midwinter. When Sibyl went away, the glory of the land departed with her. Eldorado was a place where all the women were like Sibyl, and—if this were possible even in Eldorado—all the men like Basil. Narka had, it is true, a supreme consolation to sustain her under the present parting; but even this had its drop of bitterness; she felt guilty of a kind of treachery in not telling Sibyl of her engagement. She longed and she dreaded to tell her. How would Sibyl take it? Would she open her arms and welcome her as Basil's wife? or would that pride of birth which ran through her veins as naturally, and almost as unceasingly, as her blood, rise up like a snake and turn against the old sisterly love and sting it to death? Narka had been asking herself this question ever since Basil had slipped the ring upon her finger last night. But there were many other things she longed to talk over with Sibyl: Basil's personal concerns; his chances of being forgiven and permitted to return to Russia; the possibility of indefinite exile; all that this involved—the ruin of his career, the utter blight of his prospects; but she dared not trust herself to enter on these things, lest involuntarily she might betray the secret which Basil enjoined on her to keep strictly; it seemed as if the very tone in which she now pronounced his name must tell a tale, it sounded to herself so full of consciousness.

Sibyl, on her side, had a multitude of interests that she wanted to talk over with Narka; but she made up her mind to wait until the tiresome necessary things were done, and then to devote the remaining short time to

undisturbed enjoyment of her friend. One thing she did enter on at once that afternoon. It was to ask Narka to come with Tante Nathalie and spend the winter at the castle, instead of living in their cottage in the village. But Narka refused. She loved the lordly old fortress, with its towers and stately rooms and echoing galleries, and pictures and works of art; these surroundings were as pleasant and congenial to her as space and the free air of nature to the denizens of the forest; but she could not stay in possession of them now that they were prospectively her own; there would be a sort of hypocrisy in accepting Sibyl's offer, it seemed to her; so she declined it on the plea that they, two lone women, would feel less lonely in their snug little cottage, with humble neighbors all round them, than in the splendid solitude of the castle.

Next morning, Saturday, M. de Beaucrillon proposed, the moment he came down-stairs, that if Father Christopher was not back by twelve o'clock, or if there was no assurance of the exact time of his return, Sibyl should drive in to X. after lunch and see the governor of the prison, and ask what the delay meant. Sibyl began to protest at the utter foolishness of such a step, which would advance nothing, besides wasting one of the last precious days at Yrakow; but her husband was resolute, so she yielded.

"We shall have a quiet time together on the road, anyhow; that will be something," she said to Narka.

Narka was glad; glad above all to feel that Sibyl held to a quiet time with her; that she was sighing for one of those heart-to-heart talks that they had been used to in old times, and had scarcely enjoyed with real satisfaction during these three weeks when Sibyl had been taken up with hospitable cares and activities.

Marguerite was to drive down in the pony-carriage with Narka to see Tante Nathalie after lunch.

"To think that I have not been to see your mother all this time!" she said, regretfully; "and now I am only going to say good-by."

At eleven o'clock it began to rain—a heavy, slanting rain that drove against the window-panes and washed them; the rain stopped, and it began to snow, first in a sleety shower, then in thick flakes that made a white fog, and quickly spread a white layer on the wet ground. The drive to X. was a dreary outlook. There was just the possibility, however, that it might be avoided. Father Christopher might return before they set out. If he came, he would come early, the Stanovoï said.

The snow continued to fall with increasing volume; the wind rose, and blew steadily from the north, driving the flakes furiously before it. Twelve o'clock came. There was no message, and no arrival. The carriage was to be ready at one, and take Narka and Marguerite down to Tante Nathalie for half an hour, and then return to take Sibyl and Narka in to X.

Sibyl was in the library, writing off the last notes. She was so busy that she did not hear the luncheon bell. Marguerite came and fetched her. They had scarcely entered the dining-room when a servant rushed in with the news that a carriage, which had been coming at full speed along the X. road, had just entered the park.

"It is Father Christopher!" cried Sibyl; and with a chorus of glad exclamations they all hurried into the drawing-room, where a large bow-window commanded the drive almost to the lodge gate.

The carriage came on through the blinding snow. Sibyl was laughing and crying with joy; Marguerite

was in a flutter of excitement; Narka, outwardly calm, but with a beating heart, watched the carriage drawing near.

"Let us meet him in the hall," said M. de Beaucrillon, as the horses swept round to the terrace.

They ran out, ready with a joyous welcome.

The door was open; but it was not Father Christopher who stood on the threshold. It was an officer in uniform.

"The Countess de Beaucrillon?" he inquired, looking from one to another of the three ladies.

Sibyl stepped forward, and he handed her a letter.

She tore it open, and ran her eye down the page. Then, with a piercing scream, "My God! they have sent him to Siberia!"

## CHAPTER X.

WINTER reigned at Yrakow in all its severity. The castle, with its mighty bastions and battlements sheeted in snow, went shelving down to the white forest; the fields on every side presented an interminable rolling white plain; the whole earth was buried deep in snow; and still it snowed and snowed. Narka would stand at the window and watch the flakes falling until the monotony of the motion almost sent her to sleep. The ghost-like stillness was overpowering; it seemed to wrap everything in a winding-sheet. Not a sound made a break in it all day long. In the night-time the wolves came down into the village and howled; but except for that dismal concert the land might have been a graveyard, so profound was the hush. Any sound would have been a relief—the voice of a man, the cry of an animal, the creaking of a wagon; but these would have seemed as phenomenal as if the stars had begun to talk in the midnight skies.

The death-like silence of external nature was made doubly oppressive to Narka by the moral silence which enveloped her like a shroud. Life was becalmed in a fog. She never heard from Basil. He had not sent her a sign since they had kissed and parted after that ride of hers to X. This cessation of all intercourse between them was inevitable, but at times it was unbearable. If she could have moved away anywhere, have changed place, it would have helped her, for the immobility of life adds fearfully to its weight and weariness. The

spirit is wonderfully relieved sometimes by the flight of the body, and the old Egyptians expressed a common human need as well as a deep spiritual mystery in their emblem of the sistrum agitated on either side of the sitting god for a sign that motion was Life and stagnation Death. There was nothing to stir the waters round Narka, and her moral life seemed to be stagnating like a pool in the desert.

Tante Nathalie's rheumatism and peevish complainings did not enliven the monotony much. She, good soul, found excitement enough in her own troubles, past and present, in her knitting, and the few comings and goings of the morning. This daily routine, with the ever new interest of ordering the meals and lecturing the servants, was enough to keep her occupied; but Narka's hungry, ardent soul craved for something more, and the dull white days and the long black nights dragged on with intolerable weight.

Sibyl's letters were the solitary incidents that broke the leaden monotony of her life. Sibyl gave her news of Basil. They had agreed to speak of him as "M. Charles," a cousin of Gaston's. But even this disguise had to be carefully used, for of course the letters were opened. M. Charles could not send messages to Narka, whom he was supposed never to have seen. Sibyl could only say that he was hoping to make her acquaintance, and inquiring when she was coming to France, etc. He was himself in Italy, studying painting; he hoped to come to Paris in the spring, unless his father insisted on his accompanying him to Scotland, *alias* Russia. These meagre details were to Narka like drops of water to a thirsty soul.

About her own life Sibyl spoke freely. It was evidently a very pleasant one, full of gay activities, balls,

concerts, dinners, and all the brilliant devices of modern society for making the days fly; there were also benevolent contrivances for helping the destitute, and very pleasant opportunities they seemed to be, by Sibyl's accounts. But what interested Narka most in these personal records was the place that she, though absent, filled in them. She seemed seldom long out of Sibyl's thoughts, however busy or brilliant the chapter of her life might be. "Oh, my Narka, I miss you so terribly! I feel your absence more and more every day. There is nobody like you—nobody whose sympathy is like yours," etc., etc. Words like these recurred at every page, and they were as wine to Narka. It gave her confidence in herself to be reckoned thus amongst the best values of Sibyl's life. Since Sibyl, who had all the world to choose from—Sibyl, whose taste was so refined, whose sympathies were so noble, whose instinct was so true—since Sibyl set such store upon her she could not be the poor worthless creature she sometimes fancied herself in moments of despair. Then she would remember that Basil loved her; that she was his affianced bride; that he too was reckoning the days until he could claim her for his own, and present her to Sibyl and all the world as his wife. She could surely afford to wait, and to be patient under the present, when the future held such joy in store for her.

Marguerite wrote occasionally, brightly and affectionately. But toward the close of the winter Sibyl began to speak of Marguerite with anxiety. The child's health was very delicate; there was no organic ailment, but she was drooping like a flower; they had had several excellent offers of marriage for her, but she had refused them all unhesitatingly, giving no reason except that she was not in a hurry to marry.

Narka read all this with growing apprehension. Could it be that Marguerite's feeling for Basil had been deep enough to make her shrink from the idea of ever marrying any one else? Narka had never contemplated such trouble as this. She had hoped, and had come honestly to believe, that it had been a mere passing flame, such as the first accomplished man she meets kindles easily in the heart of a very young girl. It would indeed be an added weight on Narka's spirit if bright little Marguerite was entering on life with a broken heart.

One day a letter came announcing that the doctors had ordered her to go south and travel for a couple of months.

"The remedy comes most opportunely," Sibyl said. "M. Charles has been lingering on in Florence, intending to go to Rome for Lent. It will be delightful for us to join him there, and I am very much in need of a change myself. Marguerite had at first seemed charmed at the idea of going to Rome, but all of a sudden, when the programme was settled, she changed her mind, and has been nervous and depressed ever since. The doctors say this unreasonable state of feeling is only an additional proof that she wants change, and they assure us the journey will set her right. We are now in the bustle of packing, and I shall probably not write again until we are starting."

Narka could not pretend to herself that this letter was not a shock. She was not jealous; she did not for a moment doubt the strength of Basil's constancy; but it was hardly in woman's nature that she should not feel uncomfortable at the prospect of his being thrown for two months into daily and hourly companionship with a charming girl who was deeply in love with him, and whom he was already very fond of. Oh no, Narka was

not jealous; but her heart rose in passionate rebellion against the cruel fate which put mountains and seas between her and Basil, and forced him into the society of Marguerite. And it was Sibyl's doing! For the first time in her life Narka felt angry with Sibyl. It was very well to talk about the lucky chance that had brought this meeting about; it was much more likely the result of Sibyl's clever manœuvring. She had long ago set her heart on this marriage; fate, which was fighting against Narka with such overpowering odds, was playing into Sibyl's hands, those pearly, *potelées* hands whose soft touch had such a compelling power, and had always made everybody and everything bend to their will. They were now bending Marguerite's destiny to it. Was it quite impossible that they should eventually bend Basil's?

Narka was as restless in the narrow cottage rooms as a strong, untamed creature in a cage. It was horrible to have to carry this gunshot wound in her flesh, and go about with a smiling countenance, discussing with Madame Larik the best way of preparing the codfish for dinner. The comedy of life was intolerable. Why should heaven and earth be set against her, as they had been from her cradle up?

"Narka, you are singing like a soul in purgatory crying out for prayers," said her mother, as poor Narka gave vent to her misery in a strain of passionate music.

"Mother, I *am* a soul in purgatory," she answered, with a dry laugh. "It is my firm belief that this life *is* purgatory, and that in the next there will be only heaven and hell."

"Dear! dear! what a wonderful notion you have about things! Your head is too full of poetry, child; not but that there may be some sense in what you say.

I do believe this life is purgatory to many of us, and mostly to those who don't want any purgatory, one would think. Alas! alas!"

Narka knew that the concluding sigh was directed to Father Christopher. Each knew that he was seldom out of the other's mind, but, as by tacit consent, they never spoke of him.

A week went by. There was a fresh fall of snow in the night. The next morning the wind rose, and blew with its might from the north. A carrier coming on horseback from X. said the roads were impassable from the drifts that rose like embankments at intervals. For the next week traffic was suspended. If Prince Zorokoff had been at home, or Count Larchoff alive, there would have been an army of scavengers at work; but there was no one there now to press the peasants into the service. Even the Stanovoï was away at X., which was pleasanter in this weather than snowed-up Yrakow.

At the end of three weeks the welcome face of the postman appeared at the cottage gate. He brought two letters from Sibyl. One bore the Paris postmark, the other that of Palermo. Narka went up to her room to read them alone. She opened the one from Paris first.

"I have a most extraordinary piece of news to tell you, my Narka," Sibyl began. "I ought to have written to you sooner, but I was so bewildered at the first moment that I had not the courage to finish a letter I had just begun to you.

"I told you that Marguerite showed the strangest reluctance to go to Italy when everything was settled. It puzzled us all. She was very nervous and quite miserable, but gave no explanation of her sudden change. At last, one morning before I was up, she came into my

room, and sat on the edge of my bed, and said: 'I have something to say that will be a surprise, and I fear a disappointment, to you. I can't go with you to Italy. I have made up my mind to be a Sister of Charity.' I was so taken aback that I could not speak for a moment, but just stared at her as if she had gone mad. 'I have been thinking about it for a long time,' she went on, 'and I am now quite sure it is my vocation. The idea of going to Rome and seeing the Holy Father tempted me at first; but I soon saw it was only a temptation, and that I must not yield to it; so instead of going off with you and Gaston, I am going to the Rue du Bac to make my novitiate.' I really did think that the child had gone out of her mind. 'Why,' I said, 'you will be dead in a month; the hardships of the life will kill you.' She laughed, and said, 'Oh no; I promise you not to be dead before two months; you will be back in time to see me alive.' I did not know whether to burst out crying or to be very angry. She looked so sweet and bright, and yet there was something so unnatural in the idea of her doing such a thing. Oh, Narka, if you could have seen the expression of her eyes, those clear brown eyes of hers, when she went on to talk about the happiness of giving her whole life to God, and making atonement for those who offend Him! The idea of atonement seems to have taken hold of her like an *idée fixe*. I said that if she had had a wicked father, or if any one belonging to her had committed a crime, I could understand it; then there would be some sense or some show of reason in her putting on a stuff gown and burying herself in slums and hospitals; but she said that every sinner was her brother, and she felt a call to suffer and atone for them. In fact, she has atonement on the brain.

"She asked me to break the news to Gaston. I was

quite ill at the thought of having to do it. I have such a horror of seeing anybody in pain, above all, any one I love. However, it had to be done. He cried like a child, dear Gaston. But he was not at all as shocked as I expected. He said if it was her vocation he would not lift a finger to hold her back. He talked like a theologian about people being 'called to the religious life.' I never could have believed Gaston knew so much about theology; but Frenchmen are so strange; they are full of contradictions. I was so upset by all these emotions that I had to keep lying down all the afternoon, with compresses of *eau sédative* on my head; and—"

Narka at this point let the letter drop, and interlacing her long white fingers, she straightened up her arms above her head, and heaved a great gasp of relief. It was not for herself that she was relieved. Oh no! it was for Marguerite. Gentle, sensitive little Marguerite, who had escaped from a cruel ordeal. Loving Basil as she did, it would have been torture to the child to be thrown into constant companionship with him, to be the object of his brotherly solicitude, to be forced under the charm of his sympathetic nature, a charm that no one came near Basil without succumbing to. How could she have endured this for two whole months and not gone out of her mind? Narka lay back for a long moment, considering the danger and the pain that Marguerite had been saved. This improvised vocation was of course a stratagem to escape from an intolerable trial. They might safely let her go to the Rue du Bac during their tour to Italy; they would find on their return that the vocation had come to an end. Narka smiled as she thought of Marguerite giving up her flowers and dainty coquettish toilets for the gray gown and the *cornette.* But as she smiled she felt a sudden prick of remorse and

doubt. Could it be that the idea of offering up her young life in atonement had become an *idée fixe* strong enough to impel her to the sacrifice?

Narka would not dwell on this possibility. There was another letter of Sibyl's to be read. She opened it with a pleasant anticipation of interest.

"Here we are, with ilexes and oranges making a background to the loveliest villa you can imagine! The roses are scenting the air till the sweetness makes one tipsy. If only you were here to enjoy it with us, my Narka! No delight is complete to me without you. You would find out so many beauties that I can't see, and you would sing all this exquisite idyl to me with that heavenly voice of yours! Well, some day, please God, we shall see it together.... We had a most comfortable journey, and already Marguerite looks better for the change. Oh! I forgot I had not written to you since I told you of the bomb-shell she threw at us about her vocation. Well, after a week spent in pleading and coaxing, appealing to her love for us, to every motive that could move her, the matter was decided by the Superioress of the white *cornettes*, a most fascinating woman, and a saint (Gaston says, who had several long talks with her). She told Marguerite that it would be better in every way for her to come away for the change, because the doctor of the community was in great doubt whether her health would prove equal in its present state to the hardships of the life; consequently the wisest thing would be to get up her strength before she made the trial. Marguerite was greatly disappointed at first, but after a day or so she seemed to take a more cheerful view of things, and was quite satisfied to come away. And you can't imagine how much better she already looks—so much less pale and languid. She is in excellent spirits.

"M. Charles joined us at Naples. We were all delighted to meet. He is very thin, and looks a good deal older; but his health is good. We do our best to cheer him, and he is so happy to have us near him!"

Narka did not see what more Sibyl wrote. The reaction from the intense elation of the first letter to the disappointment of this made her feel sick. She sat, with the two letters in her lap, in a kind of half stupor. Her mother's voice calling to her made her start as if she had been asleep, in a bad dream. Madame Larik knew that letters had come, and was impatient, of course, to hear all about them. Narka stood for a moment to recover her self-possession, and make up her mind how much she should tell. Perhaps it was best to read the letters as they were. There was nothing in them that she need conceal, and the mere communicating of their contents would be a relief.

She went down to the sitting-room, and read them aloud, and found Madame Larik a most responsive listener.

"What nonsense to talk of being a Sister of Charity! The pretty young creature! Of course there is a love affair at the bottom of it. Why does not Princess Sibyl find it out and settle it?"

"But you hear what M. de Beaucrillon says? He would not oppose her entering the convent in the least."

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself. I thought better of the Count. He was exceedingly polite to me. I suppose it is some great noble who has no money, or who has more than Mademoiselle Marguerite. Princess Sibyl told me that the marriages in France are such matters of business! What a pity she and our young Prince could not take to each other! Who knows but they may, now that they are going to be to-

gether for a few months? I can't think why Prince Basil did not fall in love with her here."

This was hard to hear and respond to; but Narka felt it was not so hard as having to stifle the mention of the subject altogether.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE weather had improved, the wind had fallen, and it was now possible to get out. The deep snow of course put riding out of the question; Narka regretted this, for she was a perfect horsewoman, and there was a favorite Arab of Sibyl's at the castle which was always at her orders. Her fearless command of the strong, spirited animal that bore her along with a stride as swift as a hound's gave her a sense of power that was exhilarating. While she was in the saddle, flying through the air like a bird, she felt like a prisoner enjoying a momentary escape from captivity. The flight of the body seemed to liberate the spirit and give her breathing space. In-doors she was obliged to keep strict guard over every look and gesture; she had to keep down her very thoughts with a strong hand lest they should find their way into her face, and betray her to Madame Larik's watchful eyes. This constant pressure on her life—that inner life which, to Narka, was so much more vital than the outward—made her sometimes feel as if she were, like the rivers, frozen and locked up in ice. When this feeling grew strong she would take out the betrothal ring that she wore round her neck like an amulet, and she would slip it on her finger, and recall every word, every caress, of Basil's when he had placed it there, until her spirits rose and her heart expanded, and she could look forward to the coming spring, when the sun would shine out upon her life, and unlock its frozen stream and set its waters free.

The next best thing to a ride was a drive; so the first day the weather grew genial enough to admit of it she sent up to the castle, where there were horses and vehicles of all sorts, to say she wanted a sleigh that afternoon. It was at the door at the hour she named.

The winter landscape was beautiful. The cabins and cottages, sheeted in smooth, hard snow, looked like marble shrines and tombs, from which the smoke curled up in blue spirals, like incense from thuribles. As the sleigh turned into the forest the sun shone out, and the spectacle was so dazzling that Narka made the Cossack pull up, and paused to admire it. The wilderness of white trees stretched on and on as far as the eye could reach, tossing up their arms in every fantastic form against the sky; every bough was festooned with garlands of snow flowers, or laden with bunches of crystals that sparkled like diamonds in the sunlight. The forest might have been a cathedral in ruins, so profound was the silence. Not the faintest murmur of insect life disturbed the deep hush. The very air held its breath. Suddenly a branch, not strong enough to support its mass of glittering stalactites, snapped and fell; the crash broke the stillness for a moment, but only to make it seem more profound the next.

There was something very impressive in this death-like silence of the white solitude that held so many secrets buried in its depths, so many mysteries that would never be revealed in this world. The forest was like the sea, it seldom gave up its dead. There was a pile of stones on the spot where Larchoff had been found. It had risen slowly; every stone that went to the heap had been flung with a curse, and this was the only monument which had been raised to the murdered man. As Narka noticed the snow-crusted trophy, a chill crept

over her. Would that dark secret ever be revealed? The thought of Father Christopher made her heart sick, and yet she could not deny that the crime—or the accident—might have been followed by even a more unbearable sacrifice than his cruel captivity.

She told the Cossack to drive on. She was sorry she had stopped; the sight of that mound chased away every other thought, and poisoned the pleasure of the drive. The sleigh bounded along for nearly an hour. Then she turned homeward, taking another road, that led past Ivan Gorff's house.

The absence of Ivan and Sophie was a great loss. They were not close friends; but Narka had known them all her life, and they were kind and pleasant neighbors. Moreover, Ivan would be sure to have news of Basil. Ivan's resources were numerous, sometimes mysteriously so.

As the sleigh was passing the gate, Narka was surprised to see the windows of the first story, where Sophie's rooms were, open. Could the Gorffs have returned? She desired the Cossack to turn in. The gate stood open, and as the sleigh flew up the walk to the house, she saw Ivan at a window. Before they had reached the door, he was in the hall waiting for her.

"This is a good omen!" he said, his whole countenance beaming with delightful surprise. "I only arrived an hour ago. I was just going to see you." He was radiant with pleasure, but his face wore deep traces of suffering, either moral or physical; perhaps both.

"How are you, Ivan?" said Narka, in a tone of kind anxiety that he was not used to from her.

"I am well," he answered, with a shrug of his broad shoulders; "better than I ought to be, considering. Sophie is not well."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" said Narka, feelingly. "Is it her chest?"

"Yes. She has a cough that shakes her to pieces. It is always in my ears like a death-knell. But I am a fool. She is better out of the world than in it. Have you had any news lately?" he asked, turning abruptly from the subject. It was evidently one he could not bear to discuss.

"No. Sibyl is afraid to give me much news."

"She can't be too careful, or you either," Ivan added, with a significant nod. "That is why Basil does not dare write. Every line you write or receive is read. He is in good health. I saw him ten days ago. He was—"

"Ten days ago!" Narka interrupted, eagerly. "How is he? What is he doing?"

"He is waiting," said Ivan, in his quiet way. "Have you heard about his confession?"

"Confession?" repeated Narka, and she changed color. "No."

"As soon as he heard the trick they had played him about Father Christopher's release, he wrote to the Prince, telling him that it was he who shot Larchoff."

"What?—Basil?"

"He said he had fired on him by mistake; that he would have acknowledged it at the moment, but he had not the courage to declare that he had accidentally taken the life of a man whom he was known to hate—to be on bad terms with. When Father Christopher was accused, he thought the best thing to do was to go to St. Petersburg and sue for his release. And they cheated him into believing he had made it all right."

"And then what did the Prince do?"

Ivan gave a slow smile. "He sent him word that his confession came too late to do any good to Father Christopher. Basil might have known this. What is written is written. The Prince said if he wanted to play heroics he might come back and give himself up as the murderer, and get sentence of death added to the sentence that was ready awaiting him for his other misdemeanors. This would not in the smallest degree help Father Christopher, but it would be a fine thing to do."

"And what did Basil answer?"

"He wrote a letter to the Emperor, telling the whole story, and pledging his honor to go back and deliver himself up to justice, if his Majesty would sign an order for the father's liberation."

"Oh my God!. . . .Well?"

"I never could have believed Basil was such a fool," continued Ivan, turning his face to Narka, with his slow smile, and his eyes brimming over with hilarity. "What do you think he did? He guessed, as the Prince had so many good friends in the imperial closet, there was little chance of this letter being allowed to reach the Emperor's hands, so he confided it to the servant who had brought him the Prince's letter, and gave him a lot of money to take it to a person in St. Petersburg, who was to convey it to the Emperor. Could you have believed Basil would be such a fool?" Ivan seemed quite to enjoy the revelation of Basil's foolishness.

"The servant did not deliver the letter?" said Narka, breathless and impatient.

"He did deliver it—to the Prince, of course."

"Ah! And what did the Prince do?"

"He put it into the fire. What else could he do?"

Narka tried to steal a deep breath unnoticed. "I suppose," she said, "one could not expect he would

have done otherwise." Then, after a pause, "Did Basil do anything after this?"

"Basil, in due course, received an answer from Prince W——, his Majesty's secretary, informing him that his august master was not deceived by his generous subterfuge for saving the life of Father Christopher; and, moreover, admitting even that this particular charge against Father Christopher was false, there were a score of others proved, some that would have hanged him had not the imperial clemency been extended toward him for the sake of Prince Zorokoff. After this, Basil gave up the game. He had played badly, luckily for himself."

Narka, in her heart, echoed "luckily for himself." But she was proud to know that Basil had done his utmost to set Father Christopher free, even at the sacrifice of his own liberty, and the risk of his life. After a pause, she said, "Do you believe Basil shot Larchoff?"

"No, I don't," said Ivan.

"You think he accused himself to obtain the Father's release?"

"No, I don't."

"Then what *do* you think?" asked Narka, impatiently.

"I believe he *thought* he shot Larchoff. He told me he fired at what he took for a fox crouching behind a tree; there was a sound of something falling with a heavy thud on the dry brambles, but as it was growing dark, he did not care to grope to the spot and examine his game; he meant to tell the keeper; but when he got home he forgot all about it, and it was only when the news came of Larchoff's being found murdered that, like a flash of lightning, he saw he had shot him."

"It looks likely enough," observed Narka in an undertone, as if communing with herself.

"If it had been Larchoff, he would have cried out, for he was not shot dead; he did not even lose consciousness; he was sensible to the last, and the doctor said he had been bleeding for a couple of hours, and that half an hour earlier he would still have had strength most likely to tell everything. It was loss of blood that did for him."

"Then who do you suppose shot him?" inquired Narka.

Ivan's big shoulders went slowly up, and then slowly down. "It may as likely have been Father Christopher. The wood was too dark for any one to take aim with safety; but everybody was on the *qui vive* about the wolf, and anxious to get the reward Basil had put on the brute's head."

"Father Christopher would not have been looking out for that; and he did not carry arms when he went on sick calls," argued Narka.

"Not in a general way. But there was the wolf, remember. I don't want to fasten it on Father Christopher," Ivan continued, turning his candid glance on her; "I only want to show that it was as likely to be his doing as Basil's. I did my best to make Basil see this, but he will have it that his bullet hit Larchoff. And he accuses himself of having killed Father Christopher, as well as Larchoff, by not acknowledging the accident at once. If I had not come in the nick of time, he would have been off to St. Petersburg, and given himself up as a prisoner."

"Oh!" Narka exclaimed, with a shudder; "that *would* have been madness."

"Stark madness, and without compensation of any sort. In the first place, he would not have released Father Christopher, and in the next place he would have

ruined Princess Sibyl—probably the Prince; the property would have been confiscated, and the sin of the son would most likely have been visited immediately on the father. But I had hard work to make Basil see this."

"But you did make him see it?"

"Yes, I finally did."

"How did you hear all about the miscarriage of his letter?" Narka asked—"about the forged answer sent from the Emperor?"

"Not forged, false; the letter *was* written by Prince W——. Prince Zorokoff told me the story himself when I went to him to St. Petersburg with a letter from Basil."

It apparently did not occur to Ivan that there was anything shameful in the systematic trickery of the Prince, or in his, Ivan's, making himself a tacit accomplice in it. To Narka it was a genuine satisfaction, an intense relief, to learn that Basil had endeavored to undo the wrong he had done, and to feel at the same time that Ivan and the Prince stood between him and any future rash proceedings of honor and remorse.

"Are you going to make any stay here?" she asked.

"No; I leave to-morrow morning."

"You are not likely to see Basil soon again?"

"I shall see him at Easter. By-the-way, he gave me a letter for you," Ivan said, casting about for his pocket-book, as if it were by chance he had remembered it.

"And to think of your not telling me that at once!" said Narka, as he handed her the precious letter.

"I had more to tell you than Basil has put in his letter; that I'll swear to," replied Ivan, good-humoredly. "Are you going? Won't you wait to read it?"

"No; it has waited so long, it can wait till I get

home." Narka was not going to open that letter before him, and run the chance of betraying herself. "Give my love to Sophie," she said, "and ask her to write to me. Write to me yourself, and give us news of her; that will be better."

Ivan accompanied her down-stairs, and assisted her into the sleigh, and stood watching her as it drove down the avenue and disappeared along the road.

## CHAPTER XII.

NARKA went straight home, and hurried up to her room, locked the door, and took out Basil's letter. It was not a long one. This is what he said:

"You have not misunderstood my silence. It was safest for you, and you are my first care in life. It was enough for each of us to know that the other was well. Don't lose heart. The time will not be long, please Heaven! Let this hope sustain you, as it does me. Every day I remember our last moments together. I am yours forever, through life and death."

It was a cold love-letter. But Narka read between the lines all that she wanted to see written there, and the very absence of any terms of endearment had in it a strength of assurance that satisfied her. It surprised her a little that Basil should not have confided the truth about their mutual relationship to Ivan; but she quickly reminded herself that this contrast between his reserve toward a true and devoted friend and his absolute trust in her was only a new proof of his whole-hearted love. "And so have I loved you all my life," he had said to her when he was placing his mother's ring on her finger. And the memory of those words thrilled Narka with such a great joy that for the moment fear, doubt, anxiety, every feeling but perfect trust and secure happiness in his love gave way. What could Sibyl and Marguerite and all the world together do against that love which had grown with his growth, and was strong enough to make him trample pride and every worldly

interest underfoot? Narka kissed the letter tenderly, put it into her pocket, and made herself ready to go down-stairs.

By the time she had taken off her things she was calm enough to meet her mother, and tell her of the unexpected meeting with Ivan, and the good news of his having seen Basil. This gave them enough to talk about for the rest of the day. Narka's spirits had risen suddenly to overflowing gayety, and when that evening she sat down to the piano, Madame Larik could not have compared her voice to the crying of a soul in Purgatory. It sounded more like the singing of one of the blessed in heaven, so thrilling was its jubilation, so melting sweet its pathos, filling the whole house with melody, as the song of the bird overflows its cage and floods the surrounding air with music.

And yet, for all she was so happy, Narka slept uneasily that night. She had lain down full of sweet thoughts of Basil, but when she fell asleep she dreamed a dreadful dream about him. He came to fetch her, she thought, and they drove away together. The sleigh flew over the snow for miles and miles; at last they stopped at a stone house standing in the wilderness, with miles of snow stretching round on every side. Basil got out of the sleigh, and lifted her in his strong arms into the low-roofed house, and kissed her, and disappeared. Then she found herself alone with a man in a black mask, and wearing the uniform of the police; he stood looking at her in silence through the holes of his mask, until the silent stare made her blood run cold; at last he slowly removed the mask, and she beheld the dead face of Larchoff. The horror of the sight awoke her.

It was not much to be wondered at that the emotions

of the day should have been followed by an agitated night, but this dream was so vivid that it left her nervous for some time after she awoke.

She dressed herself quickly, and went down to make the coffee, which she always carried up to her mother in bed. As she passed the entry into the little parlor there was a ring, and presently the maid ushered in a man wearing the hated uniform of the police.

"You are Narka Larik?" he said, with the abrupt directness of a person whose business can dispense with formality.

"Yes, I am Narka Larik."

"You are in correspondence with Prince Basil Zorokoff?"

"No, I am not."

"You are kept informed of his plans, and he left papers in your keeping."

"He left me nothing, and I know nothing of his plans," Narka answered, meeting the sharp scrutiny of the police officer without quailing.

He seemed staggered, she thought, by her confident bearing.

"Will you swear to that?" he demanded.

"I am not in the habit of swearing," she replied, with quiet hauteur. "To those who know me my word suffices."

"But to those who do not know you it does not suffice," observed the officer; and he drew from his pocket a long flat case, opened it, and disclosed an image of St. Nicholas. "Swear upon that," he said, holding it out to her. "Swear by the blessed St. Nicholas that you have in your possession no papers belonging to Basil Zorokoff."

For one moment Narka hesitated. For one moment

conscience staggered back from the dreadful consummation; her tongue was held, as the murderer's finger is held on the trigger before he pulls it; red lightnings danced before her; then everything was a blank. She laid her hand on the icon, and said, "*I swear it.*"

The officer deliberately closed the case and put it back into his pocket. "Another time I will take your word," he said, with a cruel smile. "You have perjured yourself, and you are my prisoner. Come!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE de Beaucrillons were at Naples.

M. de Beaucrillon had gone for a cruise in a friend's yacht, and Basil, who was staying at a hotel close by, had come to accompany Sibyl and Marguerite in their afternoon ride. Just as the party were about to start, however, Sibyl was seized with a shivering fit, and said she had taken a chill, and would stay at home. Marguerite declared she did not in the least mind giving up the ride, and was quite ready to stay with her; but Sibyl scouted the notion of this, and insisted on her going for her ride with Basil. Marguerite, reluctant to leave her, and shrinking a little from the long tête-à-tête with Basil, gave in, as everybody did to Sibyl, and the two set out together.

Sibyl watched them from the window as they mounted and rode away, and said within herself, impatiently, "If he has any sense he will have decided his own future and Marguerite's before I see them again."

Basil suspected that the chill had been invented in order to provide him precisely with this opportunity, and it annoyed him. Sibyl had done her utmost to induce him to pay his court to Marguerite, and cure her of the silly delusion about her call to be a Sister of Charity; but Basil had positively refused to make any such attempt. "If she has set her heart on a grand ideal," he said, "I am not such a fop as to imagine I could turn her from it by making love to her."

His manner toward Marguerite was perfect—a mix-

ture of chivalrous respect and brother-like familiarity—and it irritated Sibyl the more because she could not find any fault with it. It had seemed to her, however, that within the last few days Basil showed signs of falling, unconsciously perhaps, but unmistakably, under the spell of Marguerite's charm, and she was determined to give him every opportunity of becoming hopelessly enslaved. To-day, however, the chill had been an honest chill, though it served her purpose.

But the manœuvring did not further her designs. The ride was a success as a ride, but an absolute failure as an opportunity for flirtation, or even conversation.

On returning to the hotel they found that Sibyl was in her room. She had grown rapidly worse, and the doctor had been sent for, and ordered her to bed at once. She sent word that Basil was to stay and dine, and she hoped after an hour or two's rest to be better, and able to see him in the evening. This was all very clever, but Basil was not duped by it; it annoyed him, and he would have gone back to dine at his hotel if he had not been afraid it might have seemed to Marguerite rude or stupid. So they dined alone. After dinner Sibyl's maid came to say that Madame la Comtesse had a frightful headache, and could not see either of them.

Basil went away about nine o'clock. It was the end of January, but the weather was balmy as if it had been September. The sky was deep blue, and full of stars, Orion prominent, striding across the zenith with his glittering belt and his sword and his dogs. Basil wondered whether he was shining more brilliantly in the Northern skies at Yrakow than here at Naples, and whether Narka was looking at the same constellations from her window amid the snow. He thought a great deal about Narka. Since Marguerite's arrival she was

seldom out of his mind. The loyalty of his nature was in arms to protect her rights from the peril of Marguerite's presence. He said to himself a score of times a day, "She is a noble woman, she loves me, and I owe her my life." Narka might have looked into his heart all the day long and not detected one disloyal throb there. And yet, if she could have seen how sternly his honor was mounting guard over her image, it might have pained her more, perchance, than a passing infidelity, for which a warmer love would have quickly atoned.

He was loath to go in-doors, the night was so glorious. He sauntered along the Chiaja, listening to the angry growl of Vesuvius, and watching the blue waters of the bay, so calm that they reflected the stars like a second sky. It was past midnight when he went back to his hotel.

Next morning he was dawdling over his coffee when a servant knocked at the door of his room, and said there was a gentleman outside wanting to see him. Basil, surprised at so early a visit, desired him to be shown in. He uttered a loud exclamation of pleasure on beholding Ivan Gorff, grasped his hand, and pushed him into a chair, laughing and rejoicing. But Ivan, instead of responding in his usual quiet way, remained ominously silent.

"What is the matter?" said Basil, in quick alarm. "My father?"

"He is well. I saw him four days ago. But there is other trouble. Narka Larik is in prison."

Basil sprang to his feet with a cry, and then dropped back into his chair.

Ivan told the story that we know.

"It was a providential chance that I heard of the

arrest at all," he added. "I was to have left early next morning to catch the first train from X., but I overslept, and missed it, so I went out to see the Lariks, and heard what had happened an hour before. It was pitiable to see the poor mother; she was half mad with grief. I went straight to St. Petersburg, and told the Prince. He was terribly distressed. He could not have been more shocked if Narka had been his daughter. He went off at once to the police to learn where she was, and then to the Minister, and set every engine at work."

"Where is she?"

Ivan hesitated. "Well," he said, "you will have to know. She is at Kronstadt."

"Oh, my God!" Basil stood up, then walked the length of the room, muttering to himself, "*Kronstadt!* Oh God! it is too horrible. Narka! Narka! why was I born to bring this horror upon thee?" He dropped into a chair, hid his face in his hands, and sobbed aloud.

Ivan waited a moment to let the first violence of his agitation spend itself before he spoke. "You did, then, leave papers in her keeping?"

"I did—curses on me for a blind fool!" Basil, with a strong effort, mastered his emotions. "Did the police find them first?" he asked, "or did they force her to give them up?"

"They did neither. They turned the cottage inside out, but they found nothing; and Narka denied that she had anything belonging to you. She had stuck to that denial when I came away. They got nothing out of her after ten days in Kronstadt. The Prince—"

Basil put up his hand with a quick gesture, as if to stop Ivan from saying something that he could not bear.

"I was going to say," continued Ivan, "that she has

suffered nothing worse than imprisonment so far. The Prince has managed that, and he will keep on paying to prevent it."

Basil drew a deep breath. "I must at all risks go at once to St. Petersburg, and see my father, and—"

"That would be madness, and it would not help Narka," interrupted Ivan.

"Listen," said Basil. And he related rapidly the history of his threatened danger, his escape through Narka's assistance, and his troth plighted to her before they parted.

Ivan's round blue eyes grew rounder as he listened. But no one could have guessed that the story excited in him any stronger emotion than astonishment.

"You see, at all risks I must go," Basil continued. "I must go and stand by her; I must tell my father the whole truth, and ask him to come with me to the Emperor and obtain her instant release."

Ivan laid his broad hand heavily on Basil's shoulder. "Take care that you don't close the prison door on her irrevocably by overhaste in trying to open it. Your father is now moving heaven and earth in her interest; but do you think if he knew that as soon as she was free you meant to make her Princess Zorokoff, he would work as hard for her release? He would feel it his first duty to himself and you to leave her safe where she is. He would not go to the Emperor and sue him to liberate a low-born Jewess that she might be set up at the head of the Zorokoffs. It would be a choice of sacrificing her or you. Do you think he would hesitate?"

"When he hears that I owe her my life?" insisted Basil; but there was more vehemence than conviction in the way he said it. The hard logic of Ivan's reasoning fell upon him like the blows of a hammer; his

whole will rose in rebellion against it, but he felt that it was stronger than his will. "Then, in Heaven's name, what am I to do?" he cried, with the petulant despair of impotence.

"Ask Princess Sibyl to go to St. Petersburg and throw herself at the feet of the Empress, and implore her to obtain an order for Narka's release. That is the only thing you can do that will avail. But trust me, keep your secret as close from the Princess as from your father; she is a Zorokoff, and it would be sacrilege in her eyes to set the coronet of her house on the head of a Jewess."

Basil winced. He felt the full truth of this, and it exasperated him to find himself powerless, stopped at every turn from lifting a finger for the woman who had saved his liberty, and been herself dragged into such trials through his fault. It was like being pinioned in a strait-waistcoat and forced to look on while one dear to him was tortured.

"I will go to Sibyl," he said, "and you will tell her what has happened."

They went at once to Sibyl's house. The valet met them at the door with a face full of alarm. "I was coming to fetch you, Prince," he said. "Madame la Comtesse is very ill. M. le Comte has been sent for."

The chill had been no pretence. Sibyl was in high fever, tossing on her pillow, delirious.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE fever ran its course. Sibyl's life was never in actual danger, but it was six weeks before she was able to leave her room, and then nearly a month elapsed before the physicians said that they might venture to tell her of Narka's imprisonment. Even then, though Gaston broke it to her with the gentlest precautions, the shock affected her health seriously for some days.

Of course the proposal of her taking the journey to St. Petersburg, with such excitement awaiting her at the end of it, was postponed indefinitely. The typhoid fever had left mischief behind it, and as soon as she was strong enough to bear the fatigue she was to go to Schwalbach for the baths and waters.

All these delays were terrible to Basil. Without Ivan he could not have borne them. But Ivan was a staff to them all. He lived on the railway between St. Petersburg and Kronstadt and Naples, taking flying visits to the Crimea, where Sophie was rapidly fading away. Owing to the largess he scattered with royal generosity to the greedy wolves at the fortress, he was able to obtain many alleviations for Narka, and to convey written messages from her to her mother. He paid without counting wherever there was a man to be bribed or a chance secured.

Marguerite had remained with Sibyl up to the present. Her purpose was still unshaken. Basil's companionship had not made her falter, and after the severe test of many months' temptation she was more convinced

than ever that Heaven called her to renounce all things for God's sake, and for the service of the poor. Gaston, from the first, had not attempted to oppose her, and when Sibyl was pronounced strong enough to go to Schwalbach, Marguerite bade her farewell, and returned to Paris, accompanied by her brother.

The de Beaucrillons had given saints to the cloister and heroes to every battle-field, the Church, the State, and the camp, and more than one fair virgin face, shrouded in the veil, looked down on Gaston de Beaucrillon from the walls of his ancestral home. The moment had now come for him to prove that the high courage he had inherited from a knightly race had not degenerated. He loved his young sister with the tenderest affection, but when the day came he went with her to the Rue du Bac, and in the whitewashed *parloir* that has so often seen enacted the humble but divine drama of a life's sacrifice the brother and sister kissed and parted.

Then M. de Beaucrillon rejoined his wife.

Prince Zorokoff was working in Narka's behalf with a zeal that did credit to his heart, but, as his family well knew, this particular exercise of zeal was precisely what best suited his taste and capacity. The atmosphere of a court was to him the very breath of heaven; he was in his element in the midst of its intrigues and ambitions; the splendid and awful chances which made life under the eye of a despot a standing lottery, where the prizes were wealth and titles and honors and miraculous rescues, and the blanks torture, captivity, exile, and death, were to this loyal Muscovite exhilarating as wine. He was impatient for Sibyl to come and play her part in the present drama, and exert her influence with the Empress, which would be creditable to him as

well as serviceable to Narka. Finding, at last, that in spite of his urgent appeals M. de Beaucrillon insisted on his wife's carrying out the doctor's injunctions, without sacrificing one bath, the Prince resolved to act on his own unaided resources, and to entreat the Empress himself.

"Our sovereign's birthday is approaching," he wrote to Sibyl, "and I will petition her on that occasion for Narka. Her Majesty delights to bestow happiness at all times, but more especially does she love, in her adorable goodness, to make this auspicious anniversary a day of consolation to the sorrowful, and of rejoicing for all her subjects."

Nothing in Russian life and character puzzled M. de Beaucrillon so much as this servile worship of the Czar. The abject tone used by a proud nobleman like Prince Zorokoff in speaking of the despot who destroyed or destituted human beings with no more compunction than the mower cuts down the poppies in drawing his scythe through the grass was a mystery that Gaston gave up trying to solve. So inveterate was the habit of slave-like homage in the Russian mind that even when writing to his own daughter the Prince's language was as sycophantic as if he were addressing his imperial master in person, or speaking to a brother courtier who might repeat his words. And the way Sibyl acquiesced in her father's blind adoration was still more incomprehensible.

The autocratic *régime* had, however, its redeeming point—it was exciting, it was fruitful in emotions. They were generally of a painful kind, but a joyful one was just now in reserve for even Gaston. Sibyl had nearly completed her course of baths at Schwalbach, and was making ready to set out for St. Peters-

burg, when she received a letter from her father saying the Emperor had pardoned Basil, and appointed him Chamberlain to the Empress, while the Empress, on her side, had implored and obtained Narka's release. The Prince was on the point of starting with Ivan Gorff to Kronstadt with the order for her immediate liberation, and they would then convey her back to Tante Nathalie at Yrakow.

Sibyl's joy was only equalled by her gratitude. "I always felt certain that the Emperor would grant both petitions if they were properly presented to him," she said, crying and laughing with delight. "Our sweet Empress! our grand, magnanimous Emperor! May their goodness bring down every blessing on their heads!" She clasped her hands, and raised her drowned eyes to Heaven in devoutest supplication.

M. de Beaucrillon was going to retort, but he shut his lips tight, with a widening grimace expressive of determination to keep them shut. He was too thankful for the cause of these ardent benedictions to sneer at his wife's loyal effusions; but what, in the name of justice and common-sense, had Narka done to call forth this gratitude to the Emperor for having ordered her to be let out of prison? Basil had misbehaved himself, though how far his misconduct deserved the severe punishment which had overtaken him, and the still severer fate that he had escaped, had never been explained. But Narka on some vague suspicion had been thrown into a dungeon, and kept there five months, although the active searches of the police had failed to produce anything to substantiate the smallest charge against her. And because she was now liberated the heavens were to break and rain down dew upon the heads of the sweet Empress and the magnanimous Emperor! Truly

it was strange to see Sibyl, the child of a freeborn French mother, so completely the victim of inherited paternal blindness as to invest the caprice of an irresponsible tyrant with the character of divine clemency.

It was a great relief in every way that the journey to St. Petersburg was given up. M. de Beaucrillon felt as if he had himself been let out of prison when he set his face toward France, with the prospect of respite, for a time at least, from those sudden catastrophes and hairbreadth escapes which made life within breathing distance of a Russian atmosphere a constant gasp and strain.

## CHAPTER XV.

A YEAR had gone by since Narka's release and Basil's restoration to imperial favor. In that interval many things had happened. Madame Larik and Sophie Gorff had died, Sibyl had become a mother, and Marguerite de Beaucrillon had passed her novitiate, and put on the gray gown and white cornette of a Sister of Charity.

Narka, after her mother's death, left Yrakow and went to Koenigsberg, where some old friends of her mother resided. She took with her nothing but her books and a few little household gods, and her piano—Sibyl's gift to her before her marriage. So long as her mother lived she had accepted Prince Zorokoff's generous kindness, but when once alone, she refused to remain a pensioner on his bounty, and went to Koenigsberg, resolved to support herself by giving lessons in singing.

She and Basil had not met. His request for a passport and short *congé* to go and see his sister was met by a peremptory refusal, and an intimation that he had better not repeat the demand for at least a year. He chafed, but submitted. Rebellion was useless. He corresponded regularly with Narka, and though his letters were guarded in their expressions, Basil being, as he was aware, under close surveillance, he was able to make her feel that she was his chief object in life. He was bitterly distressed at not being able to repay her even a portion of his debt; but the Prince never had a

rouble to spare; he was hard set to find money for his own extravagant expenses, and to supply Basil with the means of keeping up the costly decencies of his position at court. He kept him, in fact, like a school-boy, allowing him to run up what bills he liked, but never giving him any money.

Narka was, however, so far, in no straits. She had a little sum from the sale of her furniture to start with, and she had found pupils enough to keep her moderate wants supplied. The separation from Basil was her great trial. But though she suffered, she was far from unhappy. She loved him, and she believed undoubtingly in his love for her. She was therefore like one kept waiting at the gate of Paradise, and soon to be admitted to its lovely shade and sweet-scented alleys.

Basil's plan was by patience to disarm all suspicion of his purpose, and then obtain a passport under pretence of going to see Sibyl; once free, he would marry Narka, and trust to his father's forgiving him. It was a vague enough plan, but it was the only one that held any hope of accomplishing their union; so Narka was content to abide by it, keeping her heart quiet with blissful dreams of the future that each day drew nearer to her.

Sibyl had written affectionately, offering her a home after Tante Nathalie's death; but Narka had refused to accept it. She preferred, and she knew that Basil preferred, that she should remain independent of Sibyl for the present. She gave, however, as a reason for her refusal that she hoped to find a centre of work very easily at Koenigsberg, and that for a time at least it would be better for her to be occupied and amidst new scenes and people. Sibyl assented, and agreed that

change of association and work might, indeed, be the best thing for her, after all that she had gone through. Narka ought to have been satisfied, but so inconsistent is human nature that it sent a pang through her heart to see Sibyl acquiescing in her reasons, instead of contradicting and trying to overrule them.

So life seemed to have settled down into a very narrow groove for poor Narka. Sibyl, evidently, could live without her. There was no outlook but that solitary one toward the golden gate of Paradise, and for the present this seemed blocked by a mountain of obstacles.

Not many months after her arrival at Koenigsberg an important event occurred: Sibyl's baby was born. Nothing could be more charming than Sibyl's manner of announcing the joyful event to her. "I feel," she wrote, "as if my joy in him would not be complete until I see my baby in your arms, my Narka. Ah! does the future hold in reserve for me the delight of holding *your* baby in *my* arms? I believe it does, *ma chérie.* I believe that all the sorrow that has gone before was a preparation for some great happiness in store for you."

Narka read the letter many times over. Did Sibyl guess? Or was it her own overflowing happiness that made her prophetic?

Life seemed now, indeed, a perfect joy for Sibyl, and her letters were electric in their communication of it. The baby was a little magician whose wand made everything beautiful. When in due course he performed the seemingly unparalleled feat of lisping his mother's name, the wonder was that things went on as usual, that the sun rose and set just as if nothing extraordinary had happened. Sibyl's great anxiety was lest Narka should not see him until the glory of his infant graces

had departed, and he should have entered on another phase of intelligence and fascination. But these fears were suddenly dissipated by a prospect as unexpected as it was blissful to Narka.

She received a letter from Basil telling her that he was appointed to the post of Secretary to the Russian Embassy in Paris, and was to enter on his new duties in about three months. Prince Krinsky, the newly named Ambassador, had asked for him, alleging that Basil's thorough knowledge of European languages would make him a valuable auxiliary, and that he knew no other young man so suitable for the post.

"My father is very pleased," said Basil, "though the appointment will cost him a lot of money. He has, however, found means of raising it at once, and has been so generous that I am able to send you two thousand roubles, which the bearer of this letter will hand you in German money. You will go, immediately on receiving it, to Paris, and there await my arrival. Sibyl will want you to go to her; but I prefer that you should not. We will make her understand the reason soon. I am in hopes that things will favor us more readily than I had dared expect. Of course there will be a great row. But the Empress is really kind, and I count on her support to bring round my father. That done, we shall have no more trouble. The Fates seem as if they were going to be good to us at last.

"I have written to Ivan to go and accompany you to Paris. He will find a nice lodging for you, and make you feel less lonely on arriving in the strange place. Sibyl is at Biarritz, which is just as well, under the circumstances. *Au revoir* soon, my own beautiful Narka. BASIL."

Narka could hardly believe that this wonderful news was true. Three short months, and Basil would meet her and make her his wife! Gladly would she have started that same hour for Paris, so eager was she to obey him and to find herself in the city where he appointed to meet her; but it is only people in the story-books who can follow instantaneously the dictates of their will, and put into execution a plan the moment it is formed. Some few arrangements were necessary before breaking up her little temporary home, and a week must elapse before she could possibly leave Koenigsberg. Meantime she must write to Sibyl and announce her intended departure. Her heart beat with a new delight at the thought of meeting Sibyl, of the welcome she would receive from her.

Singing and smiling to herself, Narka sat down to write. It was only when she took the pen in her hand that she remembered it was impossible for her to give the true reason of this sudden resolution of going to live in Paris. And yet it was absolutely necessary to give some reason. She rested her chin in her hand, and sat turning the pen in her fingers, considering what she could say. It did not much matter what reason she gave, provided it was a plausible enough one to satisfy Sibyl for the moment. After long deliberation she determined to say that people who knew assured her that her talent would find much wider scope and larger remuneration in Paris, and that she had finally made up her mind to follow this indication, which coincided with the longings of her own heart, and come and live within reach of her beloved Sibyl's companionship. Narka's conscience pricked her as she wrote this made-up story, but the next moment she laughed at her scruples. "I will tell her the truth soon enough," she

said to herself, "and meantime I must do what Basil wishes."

By return of post she received an answer from Sibyl. With a pleasant flutter at her hungry heart, she opened the violet-scented envelop with its delicate gold cipher, all so suggestive of Sibyl, and read:

"Oh, my Narka, what a wonderful surprise this is! What a delight it will be to clasp you to my heart, and gaze into those beautiful eyes that have been like two fountains of love and sympathy to me all my life! And then the pleasure of seeing my boy in his aunt Narka's arms, learning to love her and tyrannize over her! But, my precious one, have you sufficiently weighed the risks you run in leaving your present home for a great wilderness like Paris? It is quite true your glorious voice and your rare musical genius would in time secure you both fame and fortune; but you must first be known, and it is very uphill work in this great Paris for a stranger to become known. I hear and see a good deal of this kind of struggle, and many a time when I have been watching the disappointments and heart-sinkings of a young artist the thought of you has brought the tears to my eyes, and I have thanked God you were spared the misery of having to fight the battle of life under such cruel conditions. For though lessons are no doubt paid much more highly here than in Koenigsberg, the necessaries of life also are very much dearer.

"Darling, I feel it is kinder to tell you all this before you take a step which may lead to bitter regret. Of course, if you decide on coming, I can only rejoice selfishly for my own sake, seeing you will be like a breeze of sweet air from Yrakow. Ever thine own SIBYL."

If Narka had been asked what effect this letter produced on her, she would have likened it to a sudden chill. Yet there was no stint of tender expressions in it from first to last, and it was perhaps inevitable that Sibyl, who was the most impractical of human beings, should be scared at the idea of one like Narka coming to try her fortune in a place like Paris. Sibyl only realized two manners of existence—her own, gliding smoothly through broad, flowering meads, and that of the people sweating and toiling to keep her chariot wheels well oiled; she had no practical knowledge of any intervening states. Narka repeated these reasons to herself, and tried to take comfort in dwelling on the caressing endearments that were sprinkled through Sibyl's letter like dew-drops over the dry dust of her cold, repelling arguments.

## CHAPTER XVI.

Ivan Gorff arrived punctually at Koenigsberg, and proved the kindest and most efficient escort. He was one of those rare persons whose entire simplicity and selflessness make you feel perfectly at ease; his companionship imposed no effort; he exacted nothing; he only asked to be made use of. Narka, who had never cared much for him, suspecting rightly that he cared too much for her, had grown quite fond of him by the end of the *tête-à-tête* journey. It was like having a strong, sagacious dog always by her side, on the *qui vive* to do her bidding, never expecting thanks, but radiantly happy when she threw him a bone in the shape of an affectionate smile or a kind word. He never alluded to her relationship to Basil, but it was borne in upon her that he was aware of it.

On arriving in Paris, he found her very pretty lodgings in the Rue Chaillot, with a salon that overlooked gardens and beyond them the river. Ivan thought them expensive, but he made no observations; that was her affair.

Narka was soon at home in her new abode. She had that gift peculiar to some women of making beautiful any place where she dwelt. Her rooms were very simply furnished, but her grand Plyel piano, covered with its Turkish cloth, a rich piece of Muscovite embroidery in gold and silver and many-colored silks, gave an air of splendor to the salon; flowers and plants

set on every available spot lent it an aspect of refinement, and books spread about on the tables suggested that intellectual interest which was never absent where Narka was. She took pains to make the rooms attractive. Basil was to meet her here, and as the frame sets off the picture, so would she borrow some additional charm from the help of harmonious surroundings.

Sibyl had not said a word to her of his nomination to the Russian Embassy. "She means to let it come on me as a great surprise," thought Narka, with a pleasant consciousness of being herself much deeper in Basil's secret.

Sibyl's absence from town at this juncture was rather a relief; but Narka was impatient to see Marguerite, and her first expedition was to the Rue du Bac. She learned to her disappointment that Sœur Marguerite had been sent to Havre a month ago, and it was quite uncertain when she would return.

Narka found herself, consequently, as much alone in Paris as if she had strayed into the Sahara; for Ivan Gorff, as soon as he had done everything that was within his power for her, went back to Russia.

The weather was intensely cold; the winter was an exceptionally severe one; and Narka now understood Sibyl's apparently incredible assertion that in Paris the cold was more cruel than in Russia. In Russia you were protected against it by thick walls, and fires that were like furnaces; but here in Paris the wind that blew with a shrill blast from the north pierced the thin walls, too porous to keep it out, and whistled through chinks in the doors and windows, until it seemed to blow as hard in-doors as out. Narka, who had not yet found out what a costly luxury a good fire was in Paris, piled on the logs in her three rooms unspar-

ingly. She spent her time between singing and reading and dreaming, and fought against the cold with a blazing hearth.

So one month sped away. She was at the piano one morning, singing a Russian ballad, when the door of the salon opened, then closed. Narka took no notice, thinking it was Eudoxie, her *bonne*, with the newspaper; but when she finished her song some one cried, "Brava! brava!" and before she had time to turn round, two arms were hugging her backward, and a face under a stiff white head-gear was pressed against hers.

"Marguerite!" Narka stood up, and returned the caress with genuine delight.

These two had often wondered how it would be when they met; whether the memory of those last days at Yrakow, so pregnant with events which had influenced the destinies of both, would come between them like a presence. And now they met, and Marguerite was looking up into Narka's face with eyes full of wistful tenderness, and unabashed simplicity, and the innocent gladness of a child. But, with that intuition which sometimes belongs to children, she saw that the memory of those days had rushed upon Narka with a kind of poignant consciousness.

"Do you know," she said, still looking up with her bright brown eyes, "I feel as if we were a pair of ghosts meeting in the other world."

"We are in another world than the one we parted in," replied Narka; "I believe we both of us died a death at Yrakow before we left it."

"But we came to life again, didn't we?" asked Marguerite, eagerly.

"I suppose we must have," replied Narka; "though

you don't look a bit like a person who had ever been dead and buried."

They sat down near the fire; Narka threw on a fresh block, and made a hospitable blaze.

"How pretty your room is, and what a splendid view of the sky you have!" said Marguerite, glancing toward the windows, and round at the flowers and the home-like touches visible everywhere. Then, with a sudden change from gay to grave, "Oh, dear Narka," she exclaimed, "what you have suffered since we met! Many a time I have wondered how you lived through it."

"Yes, it is wonderful what we can live through, some of us. I must be very hard to kill, I suppose."

"That time in the prison! The very thought of it turned life into a horrible dream. I used to go about my work as if I were in a nightmare. Dear, I do believe that I prayed for you with every breath I drew all those dreadful months."

Narka's features contracted with pain; she opened her lips as if to speak, but they quivered and closed again. After wrestling for a moment with herself, "Perhaps it was those prayers that kept me from going mad," she said, "for it was like being in hell. I never look back at it. If I did, even now, it would send me out of my mind." Then, seeing her own shuddering horror reflected in Marguerite's face, "Let us not talk about it," she said. "Tell me about yourself. You look much stronger than you ever did at Yrakow, and you look so happy!"

"I *am* so happy!"

"Are you, dear? Well, I suppose the martyrs on the rack would have said they were very happy if the pagans had questioned them."

Marguerite laughed. "I can't tell what the martyrs

would have said, not being one myself, any more than you are a pagan. I only know that I am as happy as the day is long."

"And you regret nothing?"

"Nothing on this earth!" She opened out her hands, palms upward, with an emphatic gesture.

"Yet the life you are leading is that of a common servant!" Narka said, in a tone of incredulity. "Sibyl told me the Sisters themselves described the hardships as dreadful."

"They exaggerated the hardships—they always do; what they never exaggerate is the happiness. I don't believe any one in this world *could* be happier than I am. I would not exchange my lot with the most envied one on earth."

"Thank God!" Narka murmured, almost involuntarily. There was a moment of sudden consciousness to both, and then, by a common impulse, the two women bent forward and kissed each other.

"It is wonderful to hear you say that, Marguerite," Narka said, as if this tacit understanding had set her free to enter frankly on the subject. "How can you like being a peasant, and carrying burdens on your shoulders all day?"

"I love the burdens, and love, you know, makes every thing light and easy."

"Your old theory. But for all the love in the world there are things that you must miss—music that you were so fond of, and flowers that you so delighted in. How you used to revel in the winter garden at Yrakow!"

"Yes; but I don't miss anything. I am quite satisfied with the music in church on Sundays, and the canticles the children sing in the school; and I'm not sure

that a hospital ward or a sick-room is not as good as a garden to me."

Narka held up her hands. "It all sounds so unnatural!"

"So it would be if it were not my vocation. That is what makes it natural and delightful."

"I could understand it in a measure if all this discomfort and sacrifice on your side lessened the misery of the world," said Narka; "but it doesn't; it never will; the cruelty of life will remain just as universal for all your sacrifice; you will never do away with suffering."

"God forbid! What would become of the world if suffering were done away with? There would be an end of heroism, of so much that makes life beautiful. Suffering is the salt that keeps human nature from corrupting. Besides, salt or not, it is the law, and there is no escape from it. But it is not the suffering itself that is so bad; it is the revolt against it. Human nature is in rebellion against suffering, just as science is against pain. And it is a vicious circle from which there is no escaping—the more science rebels against physical pain, the more moral pain increases. If people did not rebel so fiercely against it, pain would lose half its sting. Don't you think, now, for instance, that it would be much better to bear the natural pain of disease, and be content with the legitimate means of relief, than to escape from it by drugs that destroy consciousness, and end by destroying the moral strength, so that human beings are reduced to the state of animals, without nerve or reason to bear up under their suffering?"

"You would have us all turn stoics, and, like that Spartan man, stand and grin while the fox eats into our vitals."

"I would have us bear our pain like Christians, instead of running away from it like cowards."

"You are behind your age, dear Marguerite," said Narka, with a smile. "The triumph of science is to abolish pain."

"The triumph of charity is to alleviate it; and it is better to alleviate it with love and help than to drug it with morphine."

"That sounds admirable as a theory," said Narka, with a touch of the old scorn, "but it is a fallacy; it is like your dream of reforming the world by love. You must first call in hate; hate must clear the ground before love can build. Society, as it exists, is an organized system of murder of the majority by an omnipotent minority. That old machinery must be smashed and swept away before love can come in and raise a new order of things."

"Hate would be a dreadful foundation to build on," said Marguerite. "Hate is suicidal; it destroys itself and everything else. It would be like building on a volcano. Oh, Narka, I *will* convert you into believing in love!" she exclaimed, vehemently; and she laid her hand, once so dainty, now coarsened by work, on Narka's arm, and gave her an angry shake. "What ails you that you can't believe in love?"

"I wish I could, but—one can't become a child again. To ask me to believe in love as the factor that governs the world is like asking me to believe in the fairies."

"How strange!" Marguerite murmured. "Not to believe in love is like not believing in God; for God is love."

"Your God, perhaps."

"Oh, Narka! Then tell me, if God gave you happi-

ness, everything you desire, would that make you believe in Him, in His goodness?"

"I suppose it would help me. Everybody is a better Christian for being made happy."

Marguerite threw up her hands and burst out laughing. "What theology! Did you ever read of a saint who was sanctified by having everything his own way? For that is what you understand by happiness? Oh, Narka, what a dreadful doctrine! Why, surely you know as well as I do that suffering is the road to God; that the more we suffer, the greater our likeness to our Lord Himself?"

"In that case I am as like to Him as any saint ever canonized," said Narka, with a ring of passion in her voice, "for I have suffered as much as any saint you pray to; but it hasn't sanctified me, not that I know of, unless, perchance, it be part of divine justice to make suffering meritorious, without consent or merit in the sufferer."

Marguerite was silent a moment. "I'm not sure but it may be so," she said, musingly; "I sometimes think that the mere condition of suffering has a saving power of its own." She remembered Narka's father and brother cruelly murdered, her mother's heart broken, and then that dungeon that was "like being in hell." She could not argue with wounds like these. Neither, perhaps, would God. A great poet says, "*Aimer, c'est la moitié de croire.*" It would have been nearer the truth if he had said, "*Souffrir, c'est la moitié de croire.*"

"Are there no pleasures at all in your life?" asked Narka, irrelevantly.

"No pleasures? Why, everything is a pleasure! It was an intense pleasure just now to see a sick child gobble up a pudding I had made for it. I committed glut-

tony by proxy looking at it. I must tell you," she said, confidentially, and assuming an air of innocent self-importance, "I have developed quite a genius for cooking. My puddings and *tisanes* are in great request, and I have invented a poultice that is the delight of all our rheumatic old women."

Narka was amused, and in her secret soul a little disgusted. She could sympathize, at least intellectually, with the sublime ambition that aimed at revolutionizing the world by love, but she could not enter into the glory of making slops and poultices. It was disenchanting to see Marguerite's grand vocation degenerate into such performances, to see her gifts and graces lowered to such vulgar service.

"You are not a bit changed, Marguerite," she said, observing her curiously; "always the same funny mixture of the natural and the supernatural. You supernaturalize everything without growing the least supernatural yourself."

"Indeed, I should hope not!" Marguerite laughed merrily. "I should frighten the wits out of my poor people if I turned supernatural. But you must come to see me. I want to show you to Sœur Jeanne, our Sœur Supérieure, and to let you see the schools and everything. You *will* come, won't you?"

"Of course I will, dear," said Narka, amused at her earnestness.

"I have heard nothing about your plan of life, dear Narka, or what you are busy with."

"I have been busy doing nothing, so far," said Narka, a little embarrassed how to explain her life of idleness and apparent ease. "I feel as if I were lying half asleep in a boat that had drifted into port after a storm."

"Let yourself drift; you will be all the better for

having taken a rest when you begin to work. Of course you must wait, anyhow, till Sibyl finds pupils for you ?"

"I don't see how I am to find them by myself," Narka answered, evasively. She would have gladly spoken out, and told everything, for there was that in Marguerite which invited confidence and inspired absolute trust, and at this juncture her sympathy would have been delicious; but Narka remembered Basil's desire for secrecy yet a little while, and was silent.

Basil's name had not been mentioned, nor Father Christopher's. Many things had not been mentioned that both longed to speak of; but they kissed and parted, content to leave unspoken things that were unspeakable.

## CHAPTER XVII.

In the middle of January Sibyl returned to town. She sent to Narka the day after her arrival, asking her to come that afternoon and see her.

Narka's heart beat fast as she crossed the court of the Hôtel de Beaucrillon, while the bell clanged loudly to announce her visit. A glow of hospitable warmth embraced her in the hall; palms and flowering plants spread a fragrance around that completed the illusion of a summer climate in midwinter, and her step fell softly on the thick pile of the scarlet carpet as she ascended the wide staircase, where ancestors of the de Beaucrillons looked down on her on either side in armor and hoops and wigs. One glance from the threshold showed her the whole aspect of the boudoir, whose folding-doors stood open: the pale blue velvet hangings, the Aubusson carpet, the crystal bowls and vases filled with flowers, and amidst these luxurious surroundings Sibyl reclining on a couch.

With a scream of delight Sibyl jumped up and flew with outstretched arms to embrace her friend. She clasped her, and kissed her again and again with every expression of endearment. The excitement of the meeting, the joy of being thus welcomed by Sibyl, by Basil's sister, had flushed Narka, and the pink glow, delicate as a sea-shell, gave a peculiar brilliancy to her blue-black eyes, now liquid with tender emotion.

"My Narka!" Sibyl exclaimed, in fond delight; and laying her hands on Narka's shoulders, she put her gen-

tly from her to get a better view of her. "You are positively more beautiful than ever. And oh, darling, after all you have gone through, I dreaded to find your beauty quite destroyed!"

Narka grew suddenly pale, and a tremor of the lips warned Sibyl that she must not lightly touch that wound.

"And your baby?" Narka said, looking round, as if she expected to find the little creature somewhere amongst the flowers.

Sibyl struck a gong, and in a minute there entered a large, blooming Bourguignonne with a marvellous head-gear, carrying a bundle of white muslin and pink ribbons. Sibyl seized the bundle, and with a pretty gesture of bestowal placed it in Narka's arms. It was a delicious baby, just now moist and scarlet from its sleep, but not a bit cross; it crowed and gurgled to Narka, and let itself be cuddled and kissed without struggling away, as is the habit of babies. Narka was satisfactorily enthusiastic over the paragon, and Sibyl was radiant. But the baby, having played its part, intimated a wish to retire, and had to be carried away. Then M. de Beaucrillon was inquired for, and Sibyl's health discussed, and every obvious question asked and answered, and the two friends found themselves face to face, conscious as people are who are full of feelings they must not betray, and of thoughts they must not put into words.

"Dear Narka," Sibyl began, throwing back her lace sleeves and clasping her hands, "I have a wonderful piece of news to tell you; it is about Basil."

"Ah!" said Narka, and she blushed.

"Oh, good news," Sibyl added, quickly. "He is coming to Paris, and—he is going to be married!"

Narka said "Ah!" again, accompanied with a pantomime of surprise.

"Yes. Poor Basil! after all the worry he has gone through, he is going to be happy at last. You remember Marie Krinsky, who used to take dancing lessons with us at St. Petersburg? She was four years younger than either of us, so we did not much notice her; she is now nearly eighteen, a dear little thing, pretty, accomplished, and her fortune is enormous. This is a great blessing, for, with all the drains he has on himself, my father can't do much during his life for Basil."

"And they are engaged?" said Narka, speaking calmly.

"Not yet officially; but he made his court at St. Petersburg, and my father spoke to Prince Krinsky, who was delighted, and immediately asked that Basil might be appointed secretary to the Embassy here. The Empress was very unwilling to part with him; but when she heard of the marriage she at once consented, and was most kind. As to the Emperor, he could not have been kinder if Basil had been a member of the imperial family. I am so happy I can hardly believe it is all real."

A valet brought in the tea-tray, and Sibyl, voluble and excited, sat down before it, and busied herself with the pretty preliminaries for dispensing the fragrant hospitalities of a Lilliputian silver pot.

"I have been ruminating a little plan in my head ever since I heard this great news—that is three days ago," she went on, popping the sugar into the cups. "The 16th will be Marie's birthday, and I want to make a fête that day to introduce her as his *fiancée* to our friends. I wonder what would be best—a ball, or a *soirée musicale*? What do you think?"

"I am a poor judge of such things, dear Sibyl," said Narka.

The tone, more than the words, reminded Sibyl what a mocking sound any merrymaking must have in Narka's ears—Narka, who had passed through such horrors only a little while ago, and who was still in mourning for her mother. She laid down the tiny teapot, and went over and put her arms round the girl's neck and kissed her.

"Forgive me, my sweet one; I ought to have remembered," she said, softly.

Narka returned her caress. They sipped their tea, and soon Sibyl went back to the subject of Basil's marriage. This at least must be interesting to Narka, and would not jar upon her.

"Marie is delightfully in love," she said; "it is very pretty to see how unconsciously she betrays herself. I went to the Embassy this morning, and the moment I appeared she blushed up like a red rose, and every time I mentioned Basil's name she grew scarlet. I only hope Basil is thoroughly in love with her."

Narka had gone through many ordeals, had been trained to stand and smile while the fox ate into her flesh, but it seemed to her that her powers of self-command had never before been put to so severe a test. She did not believe a word of this engagement; of course not; it was very likely a scheme arranged by the Prince, and Basil might have played a consenting part in order to deceive him and escape; it was quite impossible there could be anything more in the story. Still, the very idea of such a scheme being on foot against her happiness was enough to make her tremble. There were tremendous forces in league against Basil,

and things that were impossible sometimes happened; treachery might accomplish what open opposition failed to do. She could not shut her eyes to the fact that Marie Krinsky might be a formidable rival, young and pretty as she was, as well as high-born, wealthy, and passionately in love with Basil. Horrible possibilities flashed through Narka's mind as she sat choking down the jealous terrors that made her feel by turns savage and sick, while Sibyl dilated complacently on the joys in store for Basil with another woman. She did her utmost to appear interested, but she only succeeded in appearing indifferent; the part of a responsive listener was beyond her; she played it badly. Sibyl saw that a barrier of some sort had risen between them. There was something the matter with Narka; there was none of the sisterly *abandon* nor the exuberant delight at their reunion that she had looked forward to. Was it that Narka was hurt to find her so elated about Basil's new happiness, instead of being entirely occupied with the pleasure of meeting her? This was a little unreasonable, but perhaps it was natural. With the tact that she excelled in, Sibyl glided gently from Basil and Marie Krinsky to various other points of interest in her own life, and then, as if thankful to dismiss these subjects and enter on the one that was most in her thoughts, "And now, dearest," she said, taking Narka's hand on her knee and clasping it, "I have told you all there is to tell about myself, and I want to hear about you."

She put a series of questions to Narka about her health, her experience at Koenigsberg, her success there, her pupils, her singing, her present arrangements; and Narka answered them all as she could. When Sibyl heard the rent she was paying she said, "Oh!" and bit

her lip, and held it bitten, as if arrested and surprised beyond power of further speech.

"I thought it dear," Narka remarked, feeling very hypocritical; "but I could not stay at the hotel. It was altogether too dear. Everything is very dear."

"I warned you of that, *chérie*," Sibyl said, letting go her underlip.

"Oh yes, you warned me; if I come to grief, I have no one to blame but myself."

There was certainly something wrong with Narka. Sibyl felt it a relief when M. de Beaucrillon came in and cut short the *tête-à-tête*.

M. de Beaucrillon had not liked Narka at Yrakow; but he met her now with the most cordial warmth. There was more than courtesy, there was genuine kindliness, in the way he raised her hand to his lips, and held it in his firm grasp while he bade her welcome to his home.

"I called on you an hour ago, hoping to carry you back with me," he said; "but you had just gone out."

Narka felt her self-respect raised by the deferential kindness of this knightly gentleman. He called her Narka, which he had never done before.

"He will be a friend to me," she thought, remembering how soon she might have to put his friendship to the test.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

NARKA was very miserable after this first meeting with Sibyl, that she had looked forward to so longingly. She would not confess to herself that she attached any importance to that story of Basil's engagement; still it haunted her and poisoned her peace of mind. She could not sleep. In the middle of the night she got up and struck a light, and by way of calming herself read over Basil's letters. They were few, and they were generally short, and always guarded in expression; cold love-letters, most lovers would have called them; but to Narka they were all-sufficing; they were written as a man whispers when the enemy is listening to catch every word he says. This, she knew, was why he had not written now to tell her of his immediate arrival. Still he might have contrived to make her a sign somehow. Then, again, she remembered how necessary caution was at such a crisis, how fearful he must be of exciting suspicion. She took out her ring, and the sight of it seemed to rebuke and reassure her. She kissed it, and blew out her candle and went back to bed.

"I am like that woman," she said to herself, "who declared she did not believe in ghosts, but that she was mortally afraid of them."

Two days elapsed. Narka was at her piano when the door opened and let in a sudden puff of violets. The violets announced Sibyl before she had time to announce herself by a joyous exclamation.

"He will be here on the 15th! In seven days! Can you believe it? Can you believe it?"

She kissed Narka, and sank down on the sofa and pulled off her gloves: the first thing Sibyl did when she wanted to talk was to pull off her gloves. Those nervous, dimpled, bejewelled little hands played a great part in her discourse; they had a language of their own, without whose help much of her speech would have been incomplete.

"Narka, put on your bonnet and come off with me. I can't enjoy my happiness fully unless I have you to share it. Gaston is an angel; but he is a man; he can't understand. No one but you can sympathize with me, and feel what it will be to me to have Basil free, and married, and safe out of mischief. I have been to the Krinskys'. Marie is radiant. But we have no time to lose to get ready the soirée for the 16th. It falls on a Wednesday, which is unlucky, as that is my day. It will be a bore if he comes in the afternoon. But he will most likely arrive by the evening train. You know the 16th is Marie's birthday? I am going to Worth's to order my dress. Put on your things and come with me. It will amuse you, dearest. Come!"

Narka did as she was told: fate seemed to be making sport of her, making her play comedy in spite of herself. She was in no mood to be amused, and yet Sibyl was right, the ordering of the dress did amuse her. It amused her to see the mobility with which her companion sprang away from Basil and became absorbed in the question of *toilette*. It amused her to see the devout attention which the man dress-maker bestowed on the matter. The consultation lasted half an hour, and was conducted on both sides with the gravity befitting the importance of the subject.

"Madame la Comtesse may rest satisfied; her dress will be the event of the season," Worth remarked, with

quiet assurance, as he flung aside the costly stuffs he had been coiling and looping to illustrate his idea.

Sibyl was flushed, but cheerful and confident. "And now, dearest," she said, in Russian, to Narka, "you must order a dress"; and without giving her time to answer she turned to Worth: "Mademoiselle is in mourning, as you see, but she wants you to make her a white dress that can be worn at a *soirée de contrat.*"

The potentate of fashion fixed his eyes on Narka, as if to take in the characteristics of line and color that were to guide him. He called for white tissues, and proceeded to roll out velvets and gauzes round Narka as if she had been a statue. He then made notes and lines on his *carnet*, and handing it to her, "I think, mademoiselle, something in this style will suit you?" he said.

Narka uttered an exclamation of surprise. It might have been taken from the garment she had invented for herself at Yrakow.

"It will require a little relief," observed Worth; "a gold buckle here on the tunic, and a clasp on the shoulder fastening the long sleeves. Would that be too great a concession to ask?"

"Not the least," interposed Sibyl. "Your Russian gold ornaments will suit beautifully," she said, turning to Narka. "You must bring them when you come to try on the dress."

When they got out on the stairs, Narka said: "How foolish of you, Sibyl! My white cashmere would have done perfectly. This is only a second edition of it, and will cost a hundred times more."

"If Worth could hear you!" Sibyl's laugh rang out clear on the staircase. "Nonsense! I want you to look your best. You are going to sing. I have decided for a concert instead of a ball, and it was chiefly on your

account. I want you to shine out as a star to all my friends. Marie is going to sing with our cousin Henri de Beaucrillon, and I shall have several good artists, but you will outshine them all. Mind, you are to be in splendid voice!"

They drove about giving orders at the shops for some hours. Narka had to go back with Sibyl and spend the evening. After dinner she had to sing. Sibyl declared her voice was finer than ever, but M. de Beaucrillon remembered how that love song at Yrakow had melted the heart in his breast, and he felt that though the instrument was still beautiful, the passionate soul which had inspired it that night was absent or silent.

Every day for the next six days Narka was at the Rue St. Dominique almost from morning till night. There was no escaping from Sibyl. "I can't do without you, dearest," she repeated; "I want your sympathy and your calm strength to support me through this nervous time."

Madame de Beaucrillon's house was the apex of the world in which she moved; the domestic events which had closed it for a time had been bewailed as social calamities, and the announcement that it was going to be opened on so brilliant an occasion was received with general satisfaction. Sibyl wanted Narka to take the management of the musical programme; but Narka refused; she knew it would bring her into immediate, perhaps intimate, contact with Princess Marie, and there were limits to what she could bear. She was in constant terror of meeting Marie at the Rue St. Dominique; but fortune spared her that trial, although Sibyl had made more than one appointment to introduce them. She was presented to a number of other ladies, who assured her they were "ravished to make her ac-

quaintance." It would have been pleasant enough to be welcomed by these high-bred French women if Narka had not felt that she was under false appearances. Would they have been ravished to make her acquaintance if they had known she was going to carry off the prize so many of them were coveting for a daughter or a sister?

Since that letter from the Prince announcing Basil's arrival for the 15th there had been no news from St. Petersburg. Narka would not own to herself that this silence made her uneasy, that she was frightened, in fact. But she was.

On Tuesday afternoon, the day before Basil was to arrive, she was with Sibyl, when the servant brought in a telegram. It was from the Prince: "*Expect Basil Wednesday.*"

"How delightful!" exclaimed Sibyl; "he will come to find us all *en fête* to welcome him! If only my father had said 'morning' or 'evening'! It will be tiresome if he arrives in the evening just as the people are flocking in. Dear me, how dreadful this uncertainty is!" She moved about, and sat down, and got up again, and was fluttered and ecstatic and alarmed and impatient all in a minute.

M. de Beaucrillon thrust his hands into his pockets, and leaned against the mantel, and gazed with serio-comic gravity at his wife. "How you Russians do dramatize every crisis in life!" he said, putting his head to one side with a movement that resembled Marguerite, and he turned to Narka. The expression of her face startled him. There was no dramatizing there; there was poignant emotion that she was straining every nerve to keep under control. What need was there for this fierce effort at self-restraint?

"There is always something about that girl that I cannot understand," M. de Beaucrillon said within himself, and he looked away.

At Sibyl's request he took up the railway guide, and made it evident to her that Basil must come by a morning train, so that the excitement of the soirée would not be made too overpowering by the emotion of receiving him in the midst of five hundred guests. Sibyl wanted Narka to come and sleep at her house on the eve of the concert; but Narka had a series of reasons —all foolish ones, Sibyl thought—to prove that this would be a most inconvenient arrangement for her. In her secret soul she was convinced that Basil would arrive by the early train, and come straight to her before going to Sibyl. The idea of meeting him in Sibyl's presence was too dreadful to be contemplated. She could never go through the ordeal without betraying herself. And yet, after all, she reflected, did it matter so very much? A few days, a few hours probably, sooner or later, and the crisis must come.

When it came, how would Sibyl meet it? This question kept perpetually recurring to Narka, and filled her with an anguish of uncertainty which even the joy of meeting Basil could not banish from her mind.

Wednesday morning dawned, and it found her watching. She had been too excited to sleep. She rose feverish and unrefreshed and spent the morning coming and going from the window. Every cab that drove up the street made her heart leap. But the early hours went by, noon came, and no Basil, and no news from Sibyl.

"He will come by the evening train, and I shall have to meet him before Sibyl!" she thought. And then a terror seized upon her, and she resolved not to

go. But this panic did not last. It was quickly followed by a feeling of defiance, and a longing to let Sibyl and all the world know that she was Basil's *fiancée*, and ready to brave the whole world rather than give him up.

The day dragged heavily on till evening, and then it was time to dress. Narka coiled up her shining gold hair, and robed herself in the wonderful white draperies that Worth had combined out of soft and costly materials, and then clasped on her golden necklace and bracelets, and waited for the carriage to come for her.

As she beheld herself reflected in the long mirror of the wardrobe, her heart exulted, not from any sense of vulgar vanity—she was too proud and too chastened by sorrow for so mean a vice as vanity—but she rejoiced in her beauty for Basil's sake. "He will be glad to see me looking well amongst other women," she said to herself, with a soft thrill of happiness; and the flush of love and conscious power made her cheek glow.

When she reached the Rue St. Dominique, M. de Beaucrillon had gone to meet Basil. Sibyl was dressed, and sat watching impatiently for the return of the brougham. Narka, though outwardly calm, was trembling with excitement.

"You will be the Queen of Beauty to-night as well as the Queen of Song, my Narka," Sibyl exclaimed, in frank admiration, when she beheld her. "How pleased Basil will be to find you looking so well! Come, and let us see how the rooms look lighted. It will help to pass the time while we are waiting. Stop! there is a carriage driving in." She flew out to the landing, and called out, "Sont-ce ces messieurs ?"

The groom of the chambers answered from the hall, "M. le Comte has returned alone, Madame la Comtesse."

Presently M. de Beaucrillon came slowly up the stairs.

"What can it mean?" Sibyl asked, fluttered and vexed.

"I don't suppose it is the first time Basil has been unpunctual to an appointment," her husband said, in his solemn way; "the singular thing would be if he were to keep one."

"He must have missed the train somewhere," said Sibyl, "unless he was taken suddenly ill; but then he would have telegraphed."

"He is not ill, *ma chère amie;* I will answer for that; he is simply your brother—the best fellow in holy Russia, but born without the faculty of keeping an appointment. Where is Narka?"

Narka, whose heart had begun to palpitate violently at the prospect of seeing Basil appear in a moment, had stood clutching the back of a chair until she heard Sibyl's exclamation of disappointment, and then, regaining possession of herself, she walked quietly on toward the landing. The effect she produced on M. de Beaucrillon was so great that she could not pretend not to see it. He started, and for a second looked at her, positively dazzled. For the first time in her young life Narka realized that she possessed a sovereignty to which men were ready to bow down. By the time she had given him her hand, and he had raised it to his lips, as was his graceful habit with her, Sibyl had joined them; she was so agitated and full of her disappointment as to dispel the momentary bashfulness that Narka had felt under M. de Beaucrillon's unspoken admiration. There were a few moments of excited talk, Sibyl asking and answering a score of questions in one breath, and then the carriages rolled in quickly one upon another, and guests arrived in rapid succession.

Sibyl stood to receive them at the head of the stairs.

Narka escaped to the music-room, but Sibyl missed her in a minute, and sent M. de Beaucrillon to bring her back. He soon captured her, for the crowd was not yet large enough to give her shelter.

"I have orders to take you, dead or alive," he said, drawing her arm through his, and marching her back to Sibyl. "Must I hold you bodily in durance, or will you be my prisoner on parole?"

"I give my parole," she said.

He bowed and released her.

The gay and brilliant crowd kept streaming in, and soon the spacious suite of salons was filled. At eleven o'clock the concert began. It opened with a fine orchestral performance; then Marie Krinsky sang her duet; this was followed by several other pieces, vocal and instrumental; and then it was Narka's turn. The suspense of the day, culminating in the disappointment at the end of it, had so excited and exhausted her that she felt incapable of singing a note; her tongue was parched, her throat felt as if it were paralyzed. When M. de Beaucrillon went up and offered her his arm, she did not move, but looked up at him entreatingly.

"I *can't* sing!" she said.

It seemed cruel to insist, but he felt sure that she could. "Sibyl will be terribly disappointed," he said, after a moment's hesitation.

Narka stood up. The movement, the sudden resolution, seemed to say, "Then I will do it or die."

She took his arm and walked to the centre of the platform. Her cheeks were delicately flushed, her great lustrous eyes had a flame in them, her coral lips, clear cut as a cameo against the ivory skin, were parted tremulously, while an air of incomparable dignity and modesty heightened the effect of her rare loveliness.

There was a profound hush through the crowded rooms; the orchestra played the opening accompaniment, and Narka lifted up her voice and sang.

M. de Beaucrillon was right. She could sing. After the few notes assured her that she had command of her instrument, her voice poured out like a crystal stream, rising and swelling and trilling with as little effort as a bird's. The audience were quite carried away, and when the song was over they burst into a salvo of rapturous applause. Sibyl drifted with her serpentine grace across the platform and kissed Narka, and other ladies, following this example, gathered about her, kissing and congratulating. All round her people were exclaiming, "What genius!" "How beautiful she is!" The gentlemen were clamoring for the honor of being presented. It was one of those moments that bring with them a kind of intoxication to the calmest and wisest. Yet there was something timid in the glance of Narka's large dark eyes that seemed to deprecate all this homage and admiration. If only Basil had been there to enjoy it and to justify it! Without him, she felt the triumph was not wholly hers; she was receiving it under false pretences.

M. de Beaucrillon was charming. "Je suis très fière de ma belle-sœur," he said, presenting her to a venerable duchess whose smile was social distinction in the great world.

Even in Basil's absence it was something to have been thus welcomed by the friends to whom he would soon present her as his wife. As she drove home, Narka was conscious that it had been a brilliant evening; Sibyl had been perfect; everybody had welcomed and admired her; and she was Basil's affianced wife.

## CHAPTER XIX.

Two days went by, and there was no news from Basil. On the morning of the third day the brougham came from the Hôtel de Beaucrillon with a message requesting Narka to come at once. Narka obeyed the summons, full of anxiety as to its meaning. She found Sibyl walking up and down the library in a state of violent though suppressed excitement.

"There! read that," she said, drawing a letter from her pocket, and holding it out to Narka, without arresting her walk.

Narka, sick with suspense, sat down and read the letter. It was from Prince Zorokoff. He had discovered on the very eve of Basil's departure that the boy had entangled himself in some promise of marriage to a woman of low condition, and that this had been at the bottom of his desire to get out of Russia. "He tried to deny it at first," wrote the Prince, "but I put the holy image before him, and bade him swear the story was a lie. He did not dare do it, and he ended by declaring that it was true, and that he would never marry Marie K. or any other woman but the one he loved. I said if he married her I would curse him. I gave him three months to come to his senses and his duty. If that does not do, I will have him circumscribed under surveillance of the police at Kronstadt. The sight of the fortress will have a sobering effect."

Narka stifled a cry, and let the letter fall on her lap.

"Well," said Sibyl, coming up and standing before

her, "what do you say to this? The infatuated boy! It must be some woman he met in Italy. And with a foreign woman we are powerless. She can't be a Russian, or my father would have said so. If she were Russian, it would be easy to deal with her. A threat of the knout would soon bring her on her knees." She shut her right hand with a quick inward movement that was too expressive to be mistaken; those soft, dimpled hands were itching for the knout to scourge the woman who had come between Basil and the pride of the Zorokoffs. Sibyl was horrible to look at; her white teeth showed between her parted lips; her words came hissing; her blue eyes glittered—they never flashed when she was excited, they glittered—her features were convulsed, her whole frame shaken with passion. Narka covered her face with her hands to shut out the sight.

"Oh, Sibyl!" she murmured.

"Yes, it is too loathsome to contemplate," cried Sibyl, misunderstanding the gesture and the exclamation. "Could you have believed Basil such a weak fool? If we even knew who and where this creature is, we might buy her off. That is our only chance, as she is a foreigner. We must buy her off."

"But if she loves Basil—" Narka ventured, hesitating.

"Love him! A creature like that! *Allons donc!*" Sibyl gave a laugh that sounded devilish. She looked like an incarnate devil, or some avenging pythoness, with her glittering eyes, and her small head reared, the blue sheen of her satin dressing-gown shimmering in snake-like folds round her tall figure. Narka could not believe her senses. Was this the Sibyl she had loved all her life and worshipped as the type of all that was good and lovable?—the Sibyl who was so tender to suffering, so generous to her peasants, so indulgent to their

vices, so ready to forgive their lies and thefts and wrong-doings? What evil spirit had entered into her? And if she knew the name of the woman against whom this outburst of hate was directed, would the knowledge be a welcome relief, or would it only turn the current of her scorn and rage toward the culprit? The look of blank despair on Narka's face struck Sibyl even in the midst of her passion.

"Oh, Narka," she cried, "if *you* feel this shame so keenly, think what it must be for me!" and she sank down beside Narka, and fell upon her neck, sobbing hysterically.

Narka, faint and sick at heart, waited till the storm of grief, of fury, should have spent itself. Sibyl, who knew that it was her way to be silent when she felt most deeply, was satisfied to lay her head upon that strong and tender heart, and gave vent to her own passion in floods of tears.

They had both been too much engrossed to notice the clanging of the bell, announcing a visitor. Presently the servant came in to say that the doctor was waiting to see Madame la Comtesse.

Sibyl raised her head and wiped her eyes, and, with that mobility which was one of her characteristics, in an instant had regained complete possession of herself.

"I am coming," she said to the valet; and then, turning to Narka, "We have been so full of this horror that I had not time to tell you baby is not well," she said. "I hope it is nothing serious, but I thought it better to send for the doctor. Narka, you must come and stay with me for a few days, and help me to live through the first misery of this trial. I shall die if I have not some one to help me with sympathy. Gaston is shocked, but he can't enter into my feelings. The

brougham will take you home now, and you can put up what you want, and come straight back. Oh!" she exclaimed, looking into the girl's agonized face, "what should I do without you to feel for me!" She kissed her, and hurried out of the room.

But Narka had no notion of coming back to have her own sufferings made tenfold bitterer by the sight of Sibyl's hate and anger. By the time she had driven home she was, indeed, unequal to the effort, if she had been ever so anxious to make it. She sent a message to Sibyl saying that she had nearly fainted on getting to her own door, and must be quiet for that evening.

Poor Narka! An earthquake had come and shaken the earth under her feet since morning, and shattered her paradise to ruins. Was it possible it could be rebuilt again? Basil was now more fatally separated from her than he had ever been before. There was no chance of his escaping; the Prince would take care of that. Had the Prince any idea, she wondered, who the low woman was? And if not, would it propitiate him to hear that she was the one he had sheltered under his roof, and called his child, and rescued from a cruel captivity?

The day passed in a sort of stupor. It was only when she lay down to rest that, in the silence of the night, Narka awoke to the remembrance that apart from the wreck of her hopes, and the blow that had crushed her heart, other trials had overtaken her which would not let her sit at home and weep. What was she to do now? How was she to live? Practical dilemmas of many kinds surrounded her; urgent difficulties were pressing to be dealt with. She spent the night asking herself how she was to meet them; but the dawn broke and found the problem unsolved. Daylight seemed,

indeed, only to magnify, by letting in a more vivid mental light upon them, the troubles that had loomed, dark enough, but still vague, during the long, sleepless night.

She must leave her present apartment, for one thing. It was much too expensive for her means and prospects now. She had been spending money freely, and her funds were running low. And where was she to find pupils? Sibyl was her only resource, and her whole soul writhed at the thought of having to depend on Sibyl. Suddenly Narka remembered Marguerite.

"I will go to Marguerite," she said. And she rose and dressed herself in the gray twilight of the winter's morning.

## CHAPTER XX.

Narka was just starting for La Villette, when a vehicle stopped at the door. She looked out, and saw Sibyl's brougham. Before there was time to consider how she should endure this new ordeal, it was made evident that Sibyl was not in the brougham, for the footman jumped down with a note in his hand, and disappeared under the porte cochère. Presently there was a ring at the door. Eudoxie had gone out. "I will not open," Narka thought. "It is no doubt asking me to go to her, and I can't go; I won't go."

The servant rang three times, and then gave it up. The brougham drove away, and Narka, after waiting a few minutes to make sure of its being at a safe distance, went down-stairs.

Passing the lodge, the concierge came out and handed her a note. "The footman rang at mademoiselle's door, but no one answered him," said the woman.

The note was from Sibyl.

"Come to me at once, darling. I am in a sea of anguish. Baby has the small-pox! I am half mad.

"Your own Sibyl."

"Poor little angel!" said Narka, with a pang. But his illness at this crisis was a boon to her, inasmuch as it would keep Sibyl away, and absorb her, and draw her mind from the woman she wished to scourge.

It was a miserable morning. The rain had been fall-

ing heavily all night. Every rut and channel was turned into a pool, and a cold drizzly rain was still falling. Narka had used cabs, and freely enough, since she had been in Paris, but the stern reign of economy which had suddenly set in reminded her that omnibuses were a cheaper mode of conveyance; she asked her way to the nearest station, but when she got there it was so crowded that she had to push on to the counter for a number, and then push her way out again. An omnibus was coming up; as it slackened pace a crowd trooped after it with their umbrellas spread, looking like a whale or some huge bird in the wake of a ship. They looked intensely ridiculous "making tail." Narka did not care to add her umbrella to the show; besides, she might be kept waiting an hour for a seat. Was it not better to take a cab at once? As she was balancing the question in her mind, a gentleman close to her called out:

"Will this take me to La Villette?"

"No, monsieur," said the conductor. "The blue omnibus there, with a correspondence." The gentleman hurried away, and Narka, with an inarticulate exclamation of thankfulness for her escape, crossed the street after him to where the blue omnibus was standing, empty; they got in almost together, and took seats opposite one another. The stranger was a tall, lean man, with a sallow complexion and marked features, carefully dressed, with a certain air of distinction. Narka more than once caught his eyes fastened upon her. It so happened that they stopped at the same place; the stranger got out first, assisted her to alight, touched his hat, and went on his way.

Narka stood in the middle of the street, waiting for a break in the stream of carts and cabs to cross over. As

she glanced eagerly right and left she descried, a little higher up, a small figure in the costume of a Sister of Charity, waiting like herself to cross the busy thoroughfare. There are certain situations in which even Melpomene could not look dignified; for instance, hopping over the puddles with petticoats slightly kilted on a wet day; and yet as Narka watched Marguerite going through this trying performance it did not seem any more lacking in dignity than the steps and hops of a little child.

"Narka!" exclaimed Marguerite, in glad surprise, when they met on the foot-path. "How did you get here? Did you walk?"

"No; I came in the omnibus. Where are you coming from?"

"I have been to the Rue du Bac. I got an omnibus to the Madeleine, with a correspondence, but when I got out there was such a crowd I saw I should have to wait an hour for a place. So I started off on foot. Life is too short to be spent waiting for the omnibus. Oh, that horrid man!" she exclaimed, casting a glance full of something as near hatred as her sweet face could express at some one coming out of a shop. "I should like to see that man flayed alive."

Narka followed the direction of the glance, and to her surprise saw that the object of this murderous desire was the gentleman who had been her *vis-à-vis* in the omnibus.

"Who is that man?" she asked, as the stranger passed them.

"He is a Prussian; his name is Dr. Schenk. He stole away our dear old dog Tempête, and put him to death. Nobody saw him doing it, so we could not attack him, but there is no doubt he did it. His business is to

bribe little boys—our boys—to catch dogs that he tries experiments on. He ties them down, and cuts them up, and tortures them alive. He is a fiend."

"He is a surgeon, I suppose," said Narka. "He does it in the interest of science."

"Nonsense! How can you talk like that, Narka? It is pure wickedness, and he is a bad, cruel man."

"I don't want to defend vivisection; I loathe it," said Narka; "but it is necessary for science."

"Then science is wicked, and of the devil, and ought to be done away with. It is getting to be the curse of the world."

"What a little mediæval bigot you are!" laughed Narka.

"Am I? Well, I don't care. It makes my heart burn when I think of our poor gentle old Tempête, and I hate your cruel science that tortures our dumb fellow-servants. I think a person who invents a good poultice to relieve a poor aching body of man or beast is a greater benefactor than the man who invents how to blow up ships, or finds out secrets by torturing live dogs."

"Then you care more about dogs than about human beings?"

"I care more for any dog than for that man Schenk."

They were close by the house now. A carter came round the corner, showering blows on a powerful horse that was straining and panting under a load of stones.

"Oh, why do you beat him like that?" Marguerite cried, piteously. "Poor beast, he is doing his best. If you drive him so hard he will drop."

"He's got to drop some day, like the rest of us," retorted the man, not ill-humoredly. *Mais tranquillisez-vous, ma sœur*, he hasn't got a soul to save."

"How do you know whether he has or not?" Marguerite said, and she laid her rough little gloveless hand on the quivering flank of the animal. The meek strong creature turned his head toward her, and a glance from his drooping eyes seemed to thank her. She watched the man out of sight to make sure he did not begin the blows again.

"I sometimes think those dray-horses may be angels in disguise," she said; "they have such a patient look in their faces."

As they entered the house the children were being let loose from class into the play-ground. The rain had ceased, and the paved court was dry.

"I am just in time!" said Marguerite. "I am on guard during the play hour. You won't mind staying out-of-doors? We can sit down. I will just fetch my knitting." She ran into the house, and returned in a moment. Her appearance was the signal for a general assault from the children. There must have been nearly three hundred of them, Narka reckoned at a glance, and they all shouted and gathered round Marguerite, full of discourse of the greatest importance. They caught her by the sleeve, they clutched at her gown, they elbowed and fought to get close enough to attract her attention. Marguerite bore the onset quite unfluttered, and in some mysterious way satisfied the whole flock in a minute and a half, and sent them off to their play.

The two friends sat down in a sheltered spot, but they were hardly seated when a scream from the other end of the court sent Marguerite flying off again. A small child had been knocked down by a companion twice its size, and was proclaiming in lusty yells that it was badly hurt. Marguerite picked up the toddler, and kissed it

and made it well, and then with a sharp rebuke sent the delinquent to stand with her face to the wall.

"Now let us have a quiet talk," she said, coming back to Narka.

"There is not much chance of quiet with all these orphans to keep in order," said Narka, disappointed, and a little chilled.

"They are not all orphans," corrected Marguerite, as if the point must be of interest to Narka. "There are not more than thirty of them orphans, unfortunately. I mean the parents are so troublesome it is a pity they are not. They drink, and they neglect the poor little things, and maltreat them, and sometimes half kill them. I often think what a mercy it would be if the children of the poor could be born orphans."

"What a pity the parents don't kill them right off! Then the poor little wretches would go to heaven, instead of living to grow up and die and go to hell like their parents," said Narka.

"Oh, what a dreadful thing to say! Their parents generally die much better than they live. They have suffered so much, poor things, that God waits for them at the end."

"Oh, does He? I have often noticed how peacefully the peasants die with us."

"The poor die peacefully everywhere. They have found it so hard to live, you see, that it comes easy to them to die, even when they die as criminals. Death is always a release to them. I am very anxious just now about a poor man.—Mathilde, didn't you promise Sœur Lucie you wouldn't scratch your eye if she took the bandage off? If I see you scratching it again, I'll have it put on this minute.—His name is Antoine Drex. Such a sober, hard-working fellow, and so good to his

mother! But he married a dreadful woman who drank, and then he took to drink. One night he came home and found her dead-drunk on the floor. He went to bed, and in the morning there she lay in the same place dead, with a great cut in her temple. He was taken up for murder. They said he gave her the blow in her head. They have kept him in prison ten months without trying him. I'm afraid they will neither acquit him nor condemn him to death, but let him off with hard labor."

"You would rather he was guillotined?"

"Why, of course. He'll have to die somehow, and he'll never have so good an opportunity of dying well. He is quite penitent for his sins, and ready to accept death, but the idea of perhaps twenty or thirty years' imprisonment with the lowest class of criminals drives him to despair."

"But the disgrace of a public execution."

"Bah! When it comes to dying, that matters very little. Public opinion only matters to the living. What consequence is it the sort of death one dies in the sight of men? It is the death one dies in the sight of God that counts. For my part, I can't think of any better way of going through the ceremony of death—except martyrdom on the battle-field—than being guillotined. You have a nice quiet time to prepare, plenty of spiritual helps, and you go out to die with your energies of mind and body unimpaired. It would be delightful."

"Your family would not be of the same opinion," Narka remarked, in the same bitter, sarcastic tone she had already used.

"That is, because they are worldly; they judge things by the standard of the world. Our sisters tell me the criminals they attend in prison invariably die happy

deaths. I suppose it is because our Saviour died on a gibbet that there are such wonderful graces for those who die that sort of death."

She was knitting away diligently, her eye everywhere over the noisy population around her. Suddenly she darted away to separate two children who were quarrelling.

Narka could stand this no longer. It had been possible for a moment at first to keep her own trouble waiting; this glimpse into Marguerite's strange life was curious and exciting; but to sit on listening to talk about paupers and orphans, and waiting in vain for a chance of speaking about what her heart was full of, this was intolerable. What a fool she had been to fancy that Marguerite had kept her human heart under that pious costume! It was clear that her vocation for ministering to paupers and orphans had left no room in her sympathies for any troubles beyond rheumatism and starvation.

"Do you ever get to care for any of those dirty brats?" she asked contemptuously, when Marguerite, panting and triumphant, came back to her.

"For any of them?" Marguerite repeated, in innocent surprise. "I care for them all. I love every one of them."

"What a capacious heart you must have!"

"Oh, not half capacious enough!" Marguerite sighed, quite unconscious of the covert sneer. "I wish it were ten times bigger. If only I could empty it of self, then God would come and fill it, and make room for everybody!"

"Oh, Marguerite!" Narka burst out, with sudden vehemence, "why can't you find a corner in it for me? I do so want a crumb of sympathy!"

Marguerite looked up quickly, and in a moment her whole heart was in her eyes. She dropped her knitting, and put her hand on Narka's arm.

"You are in trouble? Oh, dear Narka, why did you not tell me that at once? What is the matter? What has happened?"

"I am in terrible trouble, Marguerite," Narka said, and pride and self-control broke down, and her voice shook, and her eyes filled, and the tears overflowed.

Marguerite hesitated for a moment; then quilting her needles, she looked up at a window on the first story, and called out, "Sœur Claire!" There was no answer. "She is not there. Never mind. Come indoors."

"But the children?" said Narka, fearful of getting her into trouble.

"Let their angels look after them. What else have they got to do?" said Marguerite, gallantly reckless; "but I can keep an eye on them from the parlor."

They went into the parlor, whose window commanded a view of the playground. It was a square room with white walls, and a polished oak floor, straw chairs, and a round table; a white Christ on a black cross hung over the fireplace. Marguerite stirred up the shabby makeshift of a fire, and drew two chairs close to it, her own facing the window. "Sit down and warm yourself, dear, and tell me what is the matter," she said, as if Narka's trouble were suddenly her one interest in life. And Narka poured out her story, Marguerite listening as if she had no longer any care on earth but to share her sorrow and comfort it. Never before had Narka realized what a healing balm there is in human sympathy, and Marguerite's sympathy was strong as fire and sweet as a child's kiss.

With extraordinary quickness she grasped the whole case, her shrewd practical sense noted every detail, measured difficulties and chances. The situation was bad enough, but by no means hopeless. She said so, supporting her opinion by sensible arguments that carried judgment with them, if not conviction. Presently, by the strength of her sympathy and her buoyant nature, she had lifted Narka from the depths of despair and compelled her to take a more hopeful view of everything. Basil's love had already proved itself equal to the pressure of antagonistic circumstances; it had stood the test of absence; it was not likely to break down before the opposition of his father; he was full of resources and of energy; and they were both so young: in fact, there were many anchors of hope to cling to.

"But Sibyl!" Narka exclaimed; "oh, Sibyl!—the thought of her breaks my heart."

"Dear Narka, you are suffering as much from the destruction of an idol (which is always a good thing for us, darling, however painful) as from the blow that she has dealt you. Half of our misery in life comes from this setting up of idols; for the idol is certain to fall down some day with a crash, and we get crushed under it."

"But I thought I knew Sibyl as I know my own heart. I never could have believed it."

"There is nearly always something in our fellow-creatures' hearts—and even in our own—that we never know, or could have believed, until some test unexpectedly reveals it to us."

"I suppose so, and that is the cruelest part of adversity; it is always applying that test to our fellow-creatures, and compelling us to try them. If only we might go on to the end trusting and believing in those we love without ever having to test them!"

"But it is sometimes good for us to be tested," said Marguerite.

Narka did not answer. Presently she said, "Do you think if Sibyl knew the truth she would hate and curse me as bitterly as she does now without knowing it?"

"It is very hard to say what Sibyl would do, she is so many characters all in one; yet when I remember the agonies of grief she certainly did suffer when you were imprisoned, and how tenderly fond she was of you at Yrakow— I can see her now when we were coming away, clinging to you as if she could never unclasp her arms and let you go."

"Ah, yes; that was just what deceived me. She took me to her arms, but she never took me to her heart; I can see that now. She has been feeding me on false sacraments of love all my life. And to think that I must be dependent on her for the means of earning my bread! Oh, if it were not for Basil, I would rather starve a hundred times!"

"You need not torment yourself about that just yet," said Marguerite; "I may be able to help you; I know a great number of people. I will speak to several friends of mine, and we will find you some lessons. Try and don't fret over that trouble; and you must stay at home and take care of yourself for a few days, or else you will certainly fall ill. I will come and see you with Sibyl in a day or two, and—"

"Sibyl!" Narka broke in. "She can't come to me. The baby is ill with small-pox."

"Nonsense! It is nothing but chicken-pox. I saw the child this morning. I forgot to tell you. I went there before I went to the Rue du Bac. Sibyl sent yesterday, imploring me to come at once; she was in an agony of grief, and wanted my sympathy. But I have

something else to do besides flying across the town with my sympathy, and as nobody was dead, I suspected it was some imaginary grief, as in fact it proved. But this morning came a message saying the baby was dying, so I went. It was nothing at all. The doctor had just been, and laughed at it. Sibyl was lying down, and could not be disturbed, and Gaston had gone out riding."

"Gaston is very good to me," Narka said.

"He has a great regard and admiration for you, and he would do anything in his power to serve you."

"I believe that," said Narka, tightening her grasp of his sister's hand.

Marguerite noticed that the hand which had been shivering with cold a little while ago was now burning hot.

"I wonder whether you would do something to please me?" she said, in a caressing tone.

"Of course I would. What is it?" Narka answered.

"Well, go home and get into bed, and I will give you something to take that will prevent your having a bad cold." She ran off to the dispensary, and was back in a trice with a small bottle and a mustard plaster. "If your chest feels sore to-night, you must promise me to put this on," she said; "and I am going to send you home in a cab. Nonsense! I have plenty of money, and I can't afford to lose my sister Narka, or to let her lose her voice. Just think what that would be!"

Narka dropped her head on Marguerite's shoulder and burst into tears; but it was not a bitter flood, and it loosened the pressure on her brain. Truly God had entered into Marguerite's heart, and made it a Bethlehem, a house of bread, where the hungry might come and feed upon that bread of love for want of which so many human lives are perishing.

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE first thing Narka did on returning home was to give notice to the concierge that she meant to leave that day week. Then, obedient to Marguerite's wishes, she went to bed. The warmth and rest, or, as Narka preferred to believe, the virtue of Marguerite's cherishing sympathy, which had passed into her remedies, had the effect of staving off the illness which had seemed to threaten her. She rose feeling little the worse physically for the violent emotions and sleepless nights she had gone through, and the chill of yesterday.

In the afternoon the concierge brought up a letter from the landlord in answer to the *congé*. It was a polite but distinct refusal to accept it. He regretted to remind his amiable tenant that she had signed an engagement to occupy, or pay for, the apartment up to the 15th of April. Narka uttered an exclamation of dismay; but referring to the paper in question, she found that this was true; she was bound to her present expensive quarters for nearly three months longer. There was nothing to be done but trust to Providence to bring her safe out of this new difficulty, as out of so many others.

In its outward tenor her life remained, therefore, undisturbed, notwithstanding the violent change that had shaken it inwardly. Marguerite's plans, practical like herself, succeeded. Through a kind and wealthy South American lady, who was a benefactress to her poor, she procured at once several rich pupils for Narka, all foreigners, who came to her house twice a week for lessons and a general singing class.

Sibyl, who was full of zeal and confident of at once gathering a crowd of pupils, was not so successful. The French mothers to whom she applied, and who had seen Narka at that brilliant soirée, generally answered: "She is too beautiful. It might be a risk for my son—for my brother."

"How stupid they are!" Sibyl said. She was vexed at failing, and this made her angry with Narka, of whom she complained to Marguerite. "I warned her what difficulties she would have to encounter, but she would not listen to me. She decided on coming, without consulting me, and then she came against my advice."

To Narka, Sibyl was affectionate as ever. She took a lively interest in the singing class, and would come and sit and listen to the lesson, and bring out the superiority of the teacher's method by her clever criticisms, thus raising Narka's value in the eyes of the pupils and of their mothers, to whom the charming and *élégante* Comtesse de Beaucrillon was an oracle on art as well as fashion. The singing lessons came in this way to be a pleasant social opportunity. Narka, moreover, might have led a gay life enough if she had been so inclined, for invitations poured in on her; but she refused them all. "I know my value," she said to Marguerite; "these fine ladies would be glad enough to have me to help out their entertainments, but if their sons or their brothers were the least bit civil to me, they would put me to the door. I sha'n't expose myself to that. Let them stay in their place, and I will stay in mine."

"Without going to soirées," Marguerite urged, "you might go and see people a little; it cannot be good for you to be always alone, brooding and moping."

"These people would do me no good," said Narka. "No solitude is so irksome to me as uncongenial com-

pany, and they are all uncongenial. They don't care a straw about me; I am simply invited to make myself useful and agreeable. They expect me to put on my best clothes and my best smiles, and exert myself for their amusement, and then be grateful to them, because they are rich and I am poor. I am making great progress in the study of human nature. I have discovered that when people are poor they are expected to have every perfection under the sun: to be perfect in manners, in principles, and in temper; never to make a mistake, to be always in good spirits, and to be useful and amusing into the bargain. If they fulfil these conditions, the world may kindly overlook their poverty, and invite them to come and cheer up its dulness."

"I won't have you turning cynic," protested Marguerite. "You must not let the trials of life embitter you, Narka."

"You won't mind if they disenchant me?" replied Narka.

But indeed sorrow had early disenchanted her with the world, and weaned her from its vanities before the time had come for tasting them. She was in no danger now of succumbing to such temptations as came in her path. Her heart was shielded from them by suffering, and by a love that absorbed her to the exclusion of all petty personal cares. She had not had a sign from Basil since that terrible letter from the Prince, and there was no one to whom she could even mention his name except Marguerite. Sibyl, as if the subject were too intolerable, avoided it. When she did speak of it, it was to pity her father and herself, and to contemn Basil, and wish the woman dead who had entrapped him.

The only person who might have given her any news of Basil was Ivan Gorff; but he had left Paris as soon

as he had conducted her there, and had never written since, and she did not know his address. There was of late something very mysterious about Ivan. Narka knew that he associated with the most advanced revolutionists, yet he came and went perfectly free, while Basil, for merely conniving at the movement which Ivan was, she suspected, actively precipitating, had been seriously compromised, only escaping imprisonment through a lucky chance. Then Ivan was leading a strange life for a man of thirty, in possession of a fortune, which, since Sophie's death, must be reckoned by millions. His personal appearance suggested biting economy, offensive slovenliness, or sordid avarice, whereas in former days he had been somewhat dandified in his dress, and generous as a king. On the journey from Koenigsberg he had put up at a miserable inn at Berlin, apologizing to Narka for taking her there, but pleading as a reason that the people were honest, and that he was in the habit of staying there. What motive could induce a man of his wealth to deprive himself not alone of luxuries, but of the comforts that he had all his life been accustomed to?

One afternoon, on coming home from a lesson, Narka, who had been thinking a great deal about Ivan, and wishing to hear from him, found that in her absence he had called and left word that he would call again next morning. It was a bitter disappointment to have missed him; he was sure to have news of Basil; he had probably seen him. She was too excited to sleep, and counted the hours till morning. But morning came, and Ivan did not appear. He had left no address, so she could not write to him. The singing class was at one o'clock, and Narka's terror was that he would call while it was going on, and that she should miss him again.

But the singing class came to an end, and there was still no sign of him. Immediately after the lesson Sibyl came to take her for a drive. There was no ostensible reason for refusing, so Narka had to go. It was the longest drive she ever took, and Sibyl noticed that she was strangely preoccupied. On returning home she found a note from Ivan saying he had been hindered from coming by an accident, but he hoped to see her in a few days. Narka was too impatient to wait for his visit. The note contained his address, so early the next morning she set out to see him. The Rue B——, where he was staying, was a narrow sort of laneway behind the Pantheon; the house a shabby-looking *maison meublée.*

"Yes, monsieur is at home," the concierge said, giving her the number of the room on the fifth story.

Narka did not stop to think of the proprieties. She mounted the dark stairs, steep and narrow as a ladder, and knocked at Number 96.

"Come in," said a voice.

She opened the door. It was a small attic room, full of tobacco smoke, with the roof slanting on one side, no fire, no carpet. Ivan was sitting in a high-backed arm-chair, buttoned to his chin in a huge furred coat, a pipe in his mouth, his head swathed to an enormous size in a woollen scarf. He looked like some grotesque caricature of a man.

"Narka Larik!" he said, removing his pipe, and his blue eyes widened and sparkled with that inarticulate laughter which gave to his countenance its peculiar expression of childlike candor and merriment.

"I thought something must have happened, as you did not keep your appointment," Narka replied. "You have met with an accident?"

"No; only a savage fit of pain that seized me like

a tiger. It knocked me over in an hour. I was half mad. But it is gone now. Schenk pricked me with morphine, and killed the pain."

"Schenk?" said Narka, interrogatively.

"He is a doctor, a very clever fellow, and a friend of mine. Sit down, won't you?" He pushed toward her the arm-chair he had been occupying, the only one in the room.

What could have reduced Ivan Gorff to these extremities?

"When did you arrive in Paris?" Narka asked.

"The day before yesterday. I have come straight from St. Petersburg without drawing bridle; I took cold on the journey. It was like travelling through Siberia."

Narka bethought herself that if he had travelled first-class he would not have had to complain of the cold.

"You saw Basil?" she said.

"Yes. He is well, but as savage as a bear. He and the Prince quarrel all day. Basil has got himself into a fine dilemma. He ought to have kept his affairs to himself, at least for a while longer."

"It was not he who told the Prince of our engagement. Some one whom he had trusted with the secret betrayed him."

"He ought not to have trusted anybody with it. He ought never to have put a line on paper about it. I warned him many a time to be cautious, that the police had their eyes and ears everywhere; but it was no use. What did you do with those papers of his?"

"I have them safe with me."

"That is foolish. You ought to burn them. They may get you into trouble again."

"How so? What do the police know about me here?"

Ivan's round eyes widened and twinkled until it seemed as if they were going to explode with laughter.

"You fancy the police don't know just as much about you here as if you were in St. Petersburg? You are very *naïve*, Narka Larik."

"Am I? Well, you have something more interesting to say than that, have you not? Tell me about the Prince and Basil. The Prince wrote to Sibyl that if Basil did not surrender within three months he would have him sent to Kronstadt, and consigned to the town until he came to his senses. Do you think he is capable of carrying out that threat?"

"He will try all soft means before he has recourse to the hard. He is trying to bribe Basil now with the promise of getting Father Christopher liberated and brought back to bless his marriage with Princess Krinsky."

"Basil is not such a fool as to fall into that trap." Narka laughed.

"Humph!" Ivan moved his huge bundle of a head slowly up and down. "The Prince is convinced that if he went to the Emperor and told him the whole story, he would grant Father Christopher's release at once. Marie Krinsky is in love with Basil, and Prince Krinsky is in high favor. The Empress, too, is greatly annoyed at Basil's refusing to marry her pet maid of honor. Basil knows all this, and then the thought of Father Christopher's captivity haunts him perpetually."

Narka grew pale. "The Emperor does not know about Basil's supposed share in Larchoff's death?" she asked.

"No; but Basil thinks he does. He never heard, of course, of that tampering with his letters."

"Does the Prince know who it is that Basil wants to marry?"

"He did not tell me if he did."

"Basil would have told you?"

"Very likely, if he had had a chance; but we were hardly five minutes alone. He wanted me to come next day and have a quiet talk; but I was bound for time. I had to leave the next morning."

What could this business be that drove Ivan from city to city, compelling him to renounce the pleasure of a meeting with his best friend? Narka felt that she must know at all costs.

"Why cannot you trust me as Basil does?" she said, looking him straight in the eyes.

Ivan met her challenging glance with a beam of satisfaction. "To trust our friends is sometimes the unkindest thing we can do. Basil proved that to you. But now that you are comparatively out of harm's way, I will tell you anything you care to know. I have thrown in my lot with those who want to do away with tyrants and set the nations free. This involves ways and means which those who don't want to risk their heads had better know nothing about. I don't care about risking mine. If it had gone while that tigerish pain was clawing it yesterday I should have been glad enough. But, on the other hand, it would upset a lot of things if I were to drop off now. I am the telegraph between all the centres. There is not a plot hatched anywhere but I am the first to hear of it. I carry messages that can't be written; I organize meetings; I get the pamphlets published; I work the occult machinery of the Socialist press, and direct its underground operations. All this gives me plenty to do. It is not the work that brings pay and glory, like the work of the hero in livery who serves a tyrant, and calls it serving his country; but it is a hero's work

all the same. The man who undertakes it must renounce everything and risk everything, and live every day with death dogging him like his shadow."

Narka looked at Ivan with a new interest; no man ever presented a more unheroic appearance than he did with his ungainly figure and his huge beturbaned head. Nevertheless she began to recognize in him a hero of some grand though perhaps dangerous type. "And is Basil involved in this work?" she inquired.

"Yes; he has thrown himself into it body and soul."

"Ah!"

They were silent for a moment. Then Ivan said: "Why should not you join us, Narka Larik? You might help greatly, and without the same risk, here in France."

"Show me how. Show me anything this head or these hands can do, and I will do it," she answered, impulsively.

Ivan held out his hand to her, and she laid hers in the broad palm that closed on it with a strong clasp. As they sat thus, hand in hand, the door opened, and a man came quickly in.

Narka recognized Dr. Schenk, and colored violently.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come!" Ivan said, slowly releasing her hand. "This is my good friend Dr. Schenk, Mademoiselle Narka Larik, one of ours."

Narka bowed and stood up.

"Pray don't let me send you away, mademoiselle. I won't detain Gorff a minute," said Schenk.

"I was just going," Narka replied, her embarrassment relieved by his perfect ease and respectful manner. "I hope there is nothing serious the matter with M. Gorff?"

"It is serious—a case of suicidal mania," observed

the medical man. "If he exercised common humanity to himself he would be as strong as a horse, but he maltreats himself as if he were a dog."

"I should not have thought you capable of maltreating a dog," Narka said, remembering Marguerite's abuse of the vivisector.

She gave her hand again to Ivan, and bowing coldly to Schenk, went out.

## CHAPTER XXII.

On reaching home Narka found a note from Sibyl which a servant had just left. She opened the violet-scented missive, and read:

"My Darling,—I bring you a wonderful piece of good news!" (Narka stopped to take breath. Had Basil surrendered?) "It has come so suddenly I can almost fancy it a fairy trick. Fortune is going to be kind to you, my Narka, and reward you after all you have suffered. Listen: I have just had a visit from Signor Zampa, who was director of the Italian opera here last year, and is now managing La Scala, at Naples. He gave me lessons when I came to Paris. Well, dearest, he is in search of a soprano voice to take the place of *prima donna* at La Scala. An artist who heard you here that memorable night carried the fame of your voice and your genius to Naples, and Signor Zampa has come on here to see if you would suit him and accept his overtures. I gave him your address, and with difficulty dissuaded him from rushing straight off to you, there and then. I said he would not find you till two o'clock, and I promised to send word to you to expect his visit at two. I am beside myself with delight. Come to breakfast to-morrow morning, and meantime attune your voice to its heavenliest key, and sing the soul out of Zampa's breast, and millions out of his pocket. Your own Sibyl."

Narka dropped the letter with an inarticulate exclamation. She was bewildered. It might, no doubt, be a most brilliant career that opened out so unexpectedly to her, but at this first moment she could not realize anything but the shock of the proposal. To turn public singer, to go on the stage—she who was engaged to Prince Zorokoff? Was it possible to contemplate such a thing? And yet how was she to refuse it without incurring Sibyl's deep displeasure, rousing her suspicions, and in that case alienating her, perhaps irrevocably? And there was not even time to think it over. It was one o'clock, and Signor Zampa was likely to be punctual. She threw aside her bonnet, and went to the piano, and excitedly turned over the leaves of a music-book. She could not well refuse to sing, if he asked her, and in the midst of her perplexity the desire of the artist to win the approval of so great a critic asserted itself.

As the clock struck two, Signor Zampa rang at the door.

Narka, flushed with excitement, looked her best when he came in.

"You have heard from the Comtesse de Beaucrillon the object of my visit, mademoiselle?" he said, conquered at once by her beauty.

"Yes. It has taken me by surprise. I never dreamed of going on the stage. I have not had the necessary training for it. I don't think I am at all fitted to be an opera singer."

"Perhaps I am a better judge of that than you. Will you let me hear you sing?"

She rose without any pretence of shyness, and went to the piano. Zampa pulled off his gloves.

"You will accompany me?" she said.

"Certainly. What will you sing?"

"Choose anything you like," motioning indifferently to the books and songs that were scattered about.

"Let's try this," he said, opening the partition of *Norma* at the "Casta Diva."

It happened to be a favorite piece of Narka's; she sang it well at all times, but stimulated by his presence she rendered it now with a perfection of art that must have delighted the *maestro*, even if her voice had not enchanted him by its rare qualities. When she ended, he burst out with a rapturous "Bravo!" and seizing her hand, kissed it with the demonstrative enthusiasm of his nation. He entreated her to sing several other pieces, each chosen with a view to bring out the various qualities of her voice. Narka, inspired by his admiration and discerning criticism, sang at her best, feeling that ecstasy in the expansion of her splendid powers which is by turns the triumph and the despair of the true artist. Every fibre in her was thrilling to the music of her voice. Something of the grand, untamed creature that was visible in her majestic lines and strong supple limbs began to throb in her pulses and course in her blood; and when the Italian started up and described the brilliant future that was before her, she was more ready to respond to his offers than she could have believed possible an hour ago. As he stood there, with his fiery eloquence and mercurial gesticulation, she could almost fancy a wizard had sprung up on her path, waving his wand, and bidding the mountains roll down and the desert blossom at her feet.

"You will be a star that will outshine every star in the musical firmament of our age!" he declared, executing a sort of war-dance on the hearth-rug in his excitement. "Europe will ring with your fame; crowned heads will bow down before the royalty of your genius!"

Narka listened, and felt something like what the bird must feel when a kind hand is about to open its cage and set it free to take flight into its native element. She had been beating the bars of her cage all her life, even before she knew it.

Zampa saw that she was won, and he kept throwing in the incense, till the fumes enveloped her and went to her brain. It was a delicious intoxication. But suddenly the sweet smoke began to choke her. She had forgotten Basil. What would he say? How would this contemplated step affect their common destiny? Would the *prima donna* millionaire be a more suitable wife for Prince Zorokoff than Narka Larik? "I am so taken by surprise," she said, not attempting to disguise her emotion, "that I cannot answer you to-day. I must have time to think over your proposal and to consult my friends before I decide. I will write to you in a day or two."

But the impresario went away confident and exulting. He had no doubt of having secured the prize.

When he was gone, Narka asked herself whether she was waking or dreaming. Had she done wisely in leaving him to believe she would entertain his offer? As to consulting her friends, whom had she to consult? Sibyl would think her insane if she hesitated for a moment, and would never forgive her for rejecting an offer that she, Sibyl, so wholly approved of. There was Marguerite: Marguerite was sure to cry out in horror at the mere notion of the stage; to her it would seem like walking into the lion's den. Still, Narka must speak to some one, and there was only Marguerite; and Marguerite's sympathy was sure to be comforting, and it might possibly be illuminating.

Early next morning she set out to La Villette. To

her great surprise, Marguerite, far from being horrified, met the idea complacently.

"I expected you would have shrieked at the bare notion of my risking my soul in such a wicked place as the theatre," said Narka.

"Is it such a wicked place?" said Marguerite. "I didn't know. A school friend of mine, a very pious girl, lost her fortune, and went on the stage, and sang for a year at the Opéra Comique, and she remained as pious as ever, and died like a little saint. But that was in Paris; perhaps at Naples it is worse."

"I suspect it is the same everywhere, pretty much," Narka replied. "But I have no fear on that score," she added, bridling inwardly. "Self-respect would protect me as well on the stage as walking about Paris alone. I was not thinking of any danger of that sort; it does not exist for me. I was thinking how the thing will appear to Sibyl."

"Sibyl? Why, Sibyl has invented it."

"I mean about Basil. Would it not be a greater degradation for him to marry me if I were a public singer?"

"Ah!" Marguerite slipped her hands into her wide sleeves, and put her head a little to one side, and gave her whole mind to the solution of this problem. "Sibyl could tell us," she said, after a moment; "but we can't ask Sibyl."

"No, we can't ask Sibyl."

They sat silent awhile. Then Marguerite, like a person who, having passed every argument in review, arrives at a conclusion, said: "It always seems to me that the safest plan is to take what Providence sends to us, and trust the consequences to Him. If you are running no risk to your soul, I don't see why you

should not accept his offer. Instead of being an obstacle between you and Basil, it may be the means of drawing you together. Perhaps Sibyl did not tell you, but her terror is that Basil, in spite of the Prince and the police, may contrive to make his escape from Russia. And if he does, how is he to live? The Prince won't supply him with money, certainly; and he would not like to be dependent on Sibyl—that is to say, on Sibyl's husband. He would not mind, perhaps, being dependent on his wife for a time."

Narka threw out her arms and caught the small figure to her heart. "Oh, Marguerite, what a blessed little Solomon you are!" she exclaimed, in delight. "That would indeed be a joyful culmination—to rescue Basil from poverty and dependence, and to be revenged on those who have been so cruel to us both!"

"Oh, never mind the revenge, Narka!" Marguerite entreated. This was not the feeling she had meant to excite; but discussing with Narka was like stirring the embers of a smouldering fire; the flame leaped up and the sparks flew out when you least expected it.

The bell rang, and Marguerite had to say good-by and hurry off to her duties.

Narka went straight to the Rue St. Dominique. She found Sibyl in high excitement.

"Zampa has been here, and he is beside himself with satisfaction! He draws such a horoscope for you as must make all the Malibrans pine with envy in their graves. Narka, you have a splendid career before you. I am so happy! It takes such a load off my heart!" She kissed Narka, and then turned to look at the practical side of the affair. The impresario was liberal as a prince. Narka was to proceed without delay to Florence, and put herself in training under the great master

there. The whole tenor of her life was changed in an hour; she was lifted from poverty, obscurity, and carking care to ease, brilliancy, and the prospect of immediate fame. Sibyl entered into it all with that quick sympathy and subtle understanding that were part of her power.

"But you take it all too coldly, Narka," she said, suddenly, her keen perception detecting the lack of response in Narka. "Are you not glad, dear? I thought you would be so excited."

"I suppose I ought to be." Then, after a moment, "Does M. de Beaucrillon say anything about it?" Narka asked, irrelevantly.

"Gaston? He is delighted. Did you think he would not care?"

"Oh no; he is too kind not to care." Narka repressed a sigh. She seemed tired. But there was something on her mind, Sibyl suspected. "I am just wondering whether it will make any difference when I am before the footlights," she said, with a constrained laugh—"whether you will feel quite the same to me when I am a public singer."

"As if that could make the smallest difference!" Sibyl exclaimed, looking at her in blank amazement.

Narka laughed in the same constrained way. "No doubt," she said to herself, "I shall remain just as far beneath the Comtesse de Beaucrillon, *née* Princess Zorokoff, whether I turn public singer, or remain in my native obscurity as Narka Larik."

So it was settled that they were to close at once with the impresario's offer. Narka sat down at Sibyl's table, and wrote a note saying she would prepare at once to start for Florence, and enter on her preparation for the opera. Then, to Sibyl's disappointment, she insist-

ed on going home, alleging that she was tired and wanted rest.

Sibyl saw that she was both excited and depressed. "You are quite feverish," she said, holding Narka's hand, and then touching her hot forehead; "you ought to stay here, and let me put you lying down, and bathe your temples with eau-de-cologne."

But Narka would not be persuaded, although she would gladly have lain down, and the touch of Sibyl's cool soft hand on her aching head would have been soothing.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

NARKA was in a glow of heat when she left Sibyl's warm rooms, and met the bitter wind that blew hard from the north. It was a long walk and a bleak one by the river, but she faced it with a kind of reckless desperation. She reached home very tired, and was scarcely in-doors when she was seized with a shivering fit.

"Mademoiselle has taken a chill," said Eudoxie. "I must make her a tisane."

But the tisane did not prove as potent as Eudoxie expected. Narka spent a restless night, and in the morning her throat was swollen, her head ached, and her hand burned.

"Mademoiselle has fever. I had better go to the chemist and ask him for something to cut it," said Eudoxie.

But Narka took a pencil and wrote a line to Marguerite, and desired the maid to take it at once to La Villette.

As Eudoxie was going out she met Ivan Gorff, and she told him on what errand she was bound.

"Mademoiselle Narka must see a doctor at once," he said. "I will go and fetch one while you take that message to La Villette."

Eudoxie gave him the key of the apartment, and hurried off to the omnibus.

Ivan called a cab and drove straight to Schenk's lodgings, and was back with him before Eudoxie had returned.

Schenk knocked at the bedroom door; there was no answer, so he opened it and looked in. Narka was alarmed and amazed on seeing so unexpected a visitor walk into her room, but he calmed her at once by his manner as much as by his words, and explained how he came there, felt her pulse, and then, without troubling her with useless questions, withdrew. The visit did not last three minutes, and nothing could have been more discreet and professional than his manner throughout.

When Schenk went back to the salon, Marguerite was there, talking to Ivan Gorff. She was horrified to find that the vivisector had been called in, but she kept this to herself; he had the reputation of being a skilful doctor, and there was comfort in that.

"What is the matter?" she inquired, when Schenk had closed the door of the bedroom.

"Inflammation of the lungs; it has advanced very rapidly; she is in high fever."

"Is she delirious?"

"She will be in a few hours, I expect."

Marguerite uttered an exclamation of distress, and went into the bedroom. Narka signed to her to stoop down. "Go to the trunk behind the door," she whispered; "you will find an ivory casket; the key is in the drawer of the writing-table. Take it away and keep it safe for me—or for Basil."

"It is safe enough where it is, darling," said Marguerite; "I will see that nobody touches it."

"But if anything happens to me—"

"You mean if you died? You have not the smallest intention of doing anything so sensible," said Marguerite, in her bright way. "You have caught a bad cold, and I am going to look after you till you get well. Our sisters here in the parish will come and see

you every day. I'm going to tell them. So between us you have small chance of escaping to heaven."

Narka made an effort to say something, but her throat seemed to close, she could only form the word with her lips, "Sibyl ?"

"I will let her know you are not well." Marguerite smoothed the pillow and the counterpane, and kissed Narka on the forehead; she then drew the curtain so as to darken the room, and went back to the salon.

During her absence Dr. Schenk and Ivan settled it between them that no one who understood Russian should be allowed near Narka, lest in her delirium she should betray secrets that might work mischief to herself and others. When Marguerite reappeared, the medical man said: "I think it right to tell you, *ma sœur*, that I see symptoms which threaten diphtheria; the disease has not taken that character so far, but it may develop it before to-morrow morning; in that case it will be necessary to find a nurse who is not afraid of the contagion. I have one whom I can trust."

"Our sisters will take care of her," Marguerite replied. "I was going to write to Madame de Beaucrillon," she said, turning to Ivan; "but if there be any fear of diphtheria she must not come."

"It would be a great imprudence to expose her to the risk, especially as there is no necessity for it," Ivan replied.

Marguerite determined to keep Sibyl away.

It proved a wise precaution as regarded Narka. She was soon delirious, and raved incessantly about Basil, about Kronstadt, about Ivan and his revolutionary work; she talked chiefly in Russian, but now and then she spoke in French, and Marguerite, who very quickly detected the fiction that kept Sibyl away, understood

enough of Narka's wanderings to make her grateful to Schenk for inventing it.

Sibyl was unremitting in her inquiries, and sent every day to know if there was nothing she could do to help. Meantime the illness, inflammation of the lungs, ran its course without complications; the danger remained throughout potential, not going beyond the peril which must attend every serious attack of the kind. M. de Beaucrillon, having heard the word diphtheria pronounced, would not hear of his wife's going near the house until Narka should have been pronounced convalescent, and until the atmosphere should have been purified of every lingering possibility of contagion. It was arranged that as soon as the doctor approved of it, she should come to the Rue St. Dominique, and remain there until she went down to Beaucrillon with the family. All this was settled without reference to Narka herself, her acquiescence in Sibyl's wishes being taken for granted. She was going on very satisfactory, but just as the day for her removal approached, the baby fell ill with croup. After a week of mortal terror and suspense to the parents, the child recovered, but was ordered off at once to waters in Germany. Narka consequently received a note from Sibyl full of despair at the double disappointment, and entreating her to go down to Beaucrillon as soon as she felt equal to the move, and wait there until they rejoined her.

It would have been a surprise to Sibyl if she could have heard Narka exclaim, on reading this note, "What a relief!" She had been looking forward with dread to the long term of close companionship with Sibyl. Weak as she was now, her one desire was to be left quiet. It would have taxed both her moral and physical strength too severely to be shut in with Sibyl, to be

obliged to undergo her effusive tenderness, and respond to it, and to hear her outpourings of anger and despair about Basil. Once again the blessed baby had come like a messenger of mercy to her rescue.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

NARKA, white as an alabaster statue, and all eyes, was sitting up in her pretty salon, looking out at the old garden, and listening to the birds singing, when Marguerite came in, bringing, as usual, fresh air from heaven with her.

"I was just thinking of you," said Narka.

"That was a very good and wholesome thought," said Marguerite.

"Yes; and I was wishing I was a dog."

"That thought was not so good."

"I was thinking that I must leave this apartment in a week, and I don't know under the broad face of heaven where to find another. Now if I were a dog, I might lodge under the stars, which would be pleasant enough, as the warm weather is at hand; but as I am a human being, the police would take me up. As I went on thinking, it occurred to me that I might find a lodging at La Villette cheaper than in this part of the city. Do you think I could get anything clean and cheap near you?"

Marguerite considered a moment. "Madame Blaquette has rooms to let at the corner of the Place; they are cheap and bright, and they take in a good bit of sky, and they are not five minutes from us."

"Then Madame Blaquette's rooms are just the thing for me!"

A week after this conversation Narka was installed at Madame Blaquette's.

Madame Blaquette was a character in her way. She

had been servant in a gentleman's family till she was forty, and now lived by letting these rooms that took in a good bit of sky. She posed for the decayed gentlewoman. She had had a bachelor uncle, a grocer, whose money she had always expected to inherit, and being blessed with a lively imagination, she had enjoyed the inheritance almost as much in prospect as if she already possessed it. She felt, therefore, deeply wronged when, at the age of sixty, this bachelor uncle took to himself a wife, and, dying at the end of a year, left all he had to her and her baby. Madame Blaquette always alluded to the event as "the loss of my fortune," and would heave a sigh when speaking of "the days before my reverses."

"She is a sentimental old goose," said Marguerite, "but honest as the sun, and her lodgers are always respectable; they are generally friends of mine."

Narka had not yet discovered that to be a friend of Marguerite's was a title to respectability open to discussion. It was not long, however, before she became aware that Marguerite was on intimate terms with all the waifs and strays and drunkards of the district, for Narka, being curious to make acquaintance with the neighborhood, and having as yet no work to do, went about occasionally with Marguerite on her rounds. In this way she came soon to see the influence Marguerite exercised, and the position she held, in spite of her youth—perhaps, indeed, because of it—with the population of La Villette. It was very amusing to see how she queened it over them all, tripping along in her heavy shoes, carrying a bundle or a basket like any little peasant woman. The children left their play to pull at her gown and get a pat on the head; women at their washtubs stopped soaping or scrubbing to exchange a word

with her, or call out some piece of domestic news; shopkeepers in the act of selling turned to nod and say, "*Bonjour, ma sœur*"; gamins and roughs suspended their wrangling, and waited till she had passed to finish their oaths. It took Narka's breath away to see the refined, delicate girl walk up to a group of quarrelling men or boys and order them to the right about as if they had been children in her school. And the horny-handed ouvrier who had spent his week's earnings at the cabaret would take the pipe out of his mouth and listen meekly while she gave him a scolding. There was something of the mother in the genial cruelty with which she looked them in the face and said the hard thing to them, and told them they made her ashamed, or angry, or sorry. Her anger would be very hot, but it never took the form of cold displeasure. She abhorred cold, cruel cold that hatches hate, the least touch of whose icy breath is more fatal to love than the hottest blast of anger. Marguerite's sympathy was an open fountain, always flowing; when the poor went to her with a grievance, she waxed so indignant with them that they felt themselves avenged; when they took her a sorrow, she pitied them so tenderly that they left the sting of it behind them.

One day, after a long morning of hard work in the dispensary and the school, Narka, who was going out with her on a round of sick visits, said, "What a tiring life it is that you lead, Marguerite! Do you never weary of it?"

"Never for a minute!" was the unhesitating reply. "That is the happiness in God's service: it may tire one's body, but it keeps one's heart merry."

"I wish I could think the poor were grateful to you," said Narka.

"Who says they are not grateful?" demanded Marguerite, quickly.

"It seems to me everybody says it; it is the constant complaint of all the good people who do for the poor that they get no return."

"What nonsense! I wonder what sort of return they expect? If they gave love, the poor would give them love back; but they only give alms, and I don't suppose they expect the poor to give them back alms? It is so silly of people to be always looking for gratitude, and then to go about complaining that they don't get it: the disappointment sours themselves, and the complaining sours other people, for nine people out of ten are ungrateful, and the complaining hits home and hurts their self-love."

Narka was amused at this touchiness concerning the poor which Marguerite displayed on the slightest provocation. They were passing by a public-house at the moment. A sound of voices raised high in altercation came through the closed door.

"I do believe that is Antoine Drex that I hear," said Marguerite. She stood to listen, and at the same moment the door opened, sending out a villanous whiff of alcohol and tobacco, and there stood Antoine Drex, bumper aloft, apostrophizing the company.

"Ah! this is how you keep your promise, Antoine Drex!" Marguerite called out from the street.

The big black-bearded man stared open-mouthed, as if the small figure in the doorway had been the ghost of his dead wife. A loud laugh from the spectators showed their sense of the comical side of the tableau.

"They look drunk; come away," said Narka, under her breath.

But Marguerite held her ground intrepidly. "Come

out here, and go home to your poor old mother," she called out to the culprit, who stood sheepishly holding his bumper on the counter; "she is very suffering this morning, and you ought to be helping her instead of drinking here."

To Narka's amazement, the stalwart man, who might have crunched up Marguerite with a finger and thumb, came out of the cabaret like a docile dog, and walked on before her. He looked dangerous enough, Narka thought, for he had been drinking copiously. This was clear from his red eyeballs and swaggering gait as with clinched hanging hands he tramped up the street before them, growling confidentially to the paving-stones.

"Is that the man you wanted them to guillotine?" Narka asked, when Antoine was beyond hearing.

"Yes. How I wish they had! He would have been safe in purgatory now, instead of getting drunk at the Chat Botté. Those ten months they kept him in prison before the trial put a heart of rage into the poor fellow that will get him into trouble some day. And it is hard, for the rage is only suffering in disguise. It nearly always is with the poor. Antoine would not hurt anybody. He is so good to his mother! Even when he is drunk he never touches her. And he often shares his crust with a neighbor poorer than himself. If I only could keep him out of the wine-shop!"

"The wine-shop is the bane of the poor everywhere," said Narka.

"It is their resource, God help them! They drink to drown misery. I do believe he is trying to give me the slip, and steal into some other cabaret." She quickened her step until Antoine turned the right corner and was out of sight. "Ah, he is gone home," she said, in

a tone of relief. "There is not another wine-shop between this and his lodging."

Life at La Villette was altogether a strange experience to Narka. At first the aspect of the place, its sordid ugliness, was so offensive to her taste as to be a positive suffering; but she soon discovered that this suffering had its compensations; underlying the ugliness that revolted and distressed her there was a hidden beauty, grander, nearer to the true ideal than the æsthetic one that she missed; then the laborious courage of the population, the kindness that springs from a sense of common privation and mutual need, made a wholesome and genial atmosphere; the open acceptance of a hard lot, and the spectacle of general poverty unredeemed by any prospect of escape, made her own lot seem less cruel. She felt, too, more independent and secure at La Villette than she had ever done at Chaillot or in the Faubourg St. Germain. Here she came and went unmolested; there was nothing shocking to public opinion in a young girl's walking out alone. The utter unworldliness of the place, the absence of any necessity for keeping up appearances, was in itself a rest. In the early morning she went out on her little household errands, and carried home her bread and her can of milk, or her little basketful of marketing, and the workmen's wives and daughters, bent on similar errands, wished her good-morning.

As she walked through the slums, where she was like no other inhabitant of the place, the people, struck by her stately bearing, her beautiful pale face, with the great eyes and the shining hair, used at first to watch her out of sight as if she had been some strange bird of gaudy plumage flitting through their dark region and brightening it for a moment. But in a little while they

ceased even to do this. "L'amie de ma sœur Marguerite" soon established her right of citizenship, and the title was a passport to everybody's good-will.

Narka had pledged her word to Dr. Schenk that she would not attempt to sing for a month from the date of her recovery. Singing lessons were therefore out of the question. In the mean time some of her former pupils were taking German lessons. These gave her a crust of bread, and, what was almost as necessary, they kept her occupied. For she was terribly lonely—more lonely than she had ever been amidst the snow-fields of Yrakow. There she had her mother, but she was quite alone now. It was a good thing that the struggle for bare life left her little time to brood; for body and soul must be kept together, the fire must be lighted, the bit of food must be cooked, the room must be swept, her shabby clothes must be kept mended, whether Basil was faithful or not, whether Father Christopher was being beaten or not, whether the Prince was cruel or relenting. And in the interval of home toil there were the lessons. These German lessons were no pleasure to her, as the singing lessons had been. They were a mere drudgery, and she was longing for the end of the month to set her free to sing, not alone for the sake of the lessons, but because the exercise of her glorious powers was in itself an enjoyment. There was only one more week now to wait. Then the period of dumbness would have expired.

Signor Zampa had gone away in despair on hearing of the illness which had so suddenly fallen like a thunder-bolt on his brilliant scheme. He had, however, assured Sibyl that the engagement should hold good for next season, and that as soon as Narka was well enough to enter on her preparatory studies he should expect her to set out for Florence.

## CHAPTER XXV.

MARGUERITE was in the dispensary, measuring and mixing herbs from two green canisters, when Narka came hurriedly in, and going up to her, laid a hand on her arm: she seemed too agitated to speak.

"What is the matter? what has happened?" Marguerite asked, dropping her little shovelful of herbs back into the canister.

"I have lost it!—it is gone, clear gone!" Narka gasped.

"The ivory box? Basil's papers? Oh!"

"No; my voice. I've lost it! I can't sing a note!" She sat down, almost letting herself fall into a chair.

Marguerite clasped her hands.

"When did you discover that it was gone?"

"Just now; not half an hour ago. I had promised not to sing a note until the month was out. Yesterday was the last day, and this morning I went to the piano. Not a note would come. Oh, it is too dreadful! too dreadful!"

Marguerite, with an answering despair in her face, stood silent, her hands still clasped.

Narka looked up, and saw the sweet brown eyes filling with tears; she bent forward, and let her head drop against Marguerite's arm. "Oh," she said, "what a weary burden life is! If one might but escape from it!"

Marguerite put her arms round her, and held her clasped, making a little swaying movement, as if she were rocking a child.

"It is, darling," she said, softly, after a moment's silence; "it *is* very weary; but we are not carrying it

alone. There is One under the burden with us whose help can never fail."

Narka felt the loving breast heave under her head, and then two hot tears fall upon her cheek. If Marguerite was so full of pity, why was Marguerite's God so cruel?

"Perhaps it is not so bad as you think," said Marguerite, presently, her sunny hopefulness and practical sense coming quickly to the relief. "After all, it may be only a temporary loss of voice. I knew a case like that in a young chorister whom we had to nurse after a typhoid fever; his voice went for some months, and he was in despair; but it came back. You must see a specialist. There is Dr. X——, who comes to the infirmary here on Tuesday; he is a great authority on the lungs and the throat. I will speak to Sœur Jeanne and ask her to arrange for you to see him here after his visit to the infirmary."

This practical suggestion was just the touch that Narka wanted to lift her up from the torpor of despair into which the shock had thrown her. She talked it over with Marguerite, asked questions about the chorister's case; and if Marguerite strained the facts a trifle to sustain the hope they pointed to, the sin was certainly not written down against her by the recording angel. Narka went away wonderfully comforted.

The community were at once interested in her trouble. The children were all set praying for Sœur Marguerite's friend, and every one in the house awaited with anxious curiosity to hear what Dr. X—— would say. They had not long to wait. On Tuesday morning the consultation took place. The result confirmed Marguerite's sanguine view. Dr. X—— was of opinion that the loss of the voice was likely to be only temporary. The

organs were weakened by the severe inflammation they had suffered, and rest and care would in time restore their powers. If Narka had had change to the country and proper care during the period of convalescence, the accident would most likely have been avoided. She was now to think as little about it as possible, to take any amusement within her reach, and to follow his treatment carefully, and he promised that before long her voice would be as fine as ever.

This verdict was received with joy by the whole community, to whom it was at once communicated by the Sister Superior. Marguerite was almost as thankful as Narka, and much more demonstrative in her satisfaction, for she already believed, while Narka still only dared to hope.

"I wish you could have some recreation, something to take your mind off trouble and worry," she said, as she and Narka sat together in the parlor after the consultation. "What a pity Sibyl is away! And she won't stop in Paris on her way from Biarritz to Carlsbad, it seems; that is, she will only just rest for the night."

"I am very thankful to her for keeping out of the way," said Narka; "it was irksome as well as odious to me to have to play the hypocrite with her. And what else can I do now?" There was no denying this.

"I almost wish it were the winter that was at hand, and not the summer," Marguerite said; "then your old pupils would be coming round you, and you would have your pleasant little gatherings, as you used to have at Chaillot."

Narka laughed. "I am not so silly as to expect anything of that sort up here. I told you before that I knew my value."

"What do you mean? The people who were fond of you in one place would be fond of you in another, I suppose?"

"Yes, if they ever had been fond of me. But you don't suppose the people who came after me at Chaillot and made a fuss over me were fond of me?"

"Then why did they come after you and make a fuss over you?"

Narka laughed again. "You heavenly little dunce! You don't know the A B C of the gospel of this world. Its catechism is Greek to you. You don't know that contempt of poverty is the negative side of purse-pride, and that to patronize poverty is one of the amusements of the rich. You are a dunce about these things; you know nothing about the vulgarities of well-bred people and the cruelties of pious people. Fond of me! Poor dears! they were fond enough of me to turn in and spend a pleasant half-hour on their way to the Bois; but they would not drive up to this shabby place to see me. I'm not worth it."

"Then you have no loss in such butterfly friends," said Marguerite; "there are better ones in store for you, please God. One must always reckon on the generous chances of life."

"The generous chances of life!" Narka repeated, with a light laugh that was very acid. "The generous chances of life never come to those who want them. I have found that out before this."

"I will not have you turning sour, and looking only at the bad side of life and human beings," said Marguerite.

"I cannot help it; my poverty hides the other side from me. But if it shuts the light out on one side, it lets it in on the other, and shows the flaws in human

beings as a magnifying-glass shows the animalcula in a drop of water. When you are poor, you see the world as it really is, with its meannesses and its vulgarities and its cruelties; people don't take the trouble to wear a mask before you; you are not worth it; it does not matter if you see the seamy side of their character; but they must take pains to make it show fair to society. My rich pupils and their mothers fancied the lessons were all on one side; they were mistaken; they taught me quite as much of their arts as I them of mine."

"All this may be very clever and sarcastic," said Marguerite, "but it strikes me it is morbid, and not very charitable. It is of no use to discover our neighbor's faults unless it helps us to correct our own. There is the bell! I must go to the children's singing class."

"I wish you would take me in hand, Marguerite, and correct me and make me good," said Narka. "I should like to be one of your orphans, and sit on a bench and have you teach me to sing canticles, and scold me when I was naughty."

"I'm afraid I should be scolding you from morning till night," said Marguerite, tossing her head; "you would never obey me without wanting to know the why and the wherefore of everything." She put the canisters in their place, and hurried off to the singing class.

Narka watched her crossing the court, her step so brisk, her whole air breathing the content of a life brimful of glad activities. "Why could not I have a vocation," Narka thought, "and join these brave women, and make my life a service of love for humanity?" She sighed; but she went home with a lightened heart, as she generally did from Marguerite's companionship.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

On entering the house Narka saw a man standing in the dark entry with the bell-rope of her door in his hand. At the first glance she did not recognize him. It was Ivan Gorff.

She uttered an exclamation of welcoming surprise, and they went in together.

"Where have you come from?" she asked, excitedly, when she had closed the door.

"From everywhere."

"Not from St. Petersburg?"

"St. Petersburg is somewhere, is it not?" Ivan said, and his face, that looked very haggard, was momentarily brightened by one of his old frank smiles.

Narka saw there was no bad news, so she inquired after his health. He shrugged his shoulders as if the question were not worth either asking or answering.

"I saw Basil a fortnight ago," he said, taking compassion on her. "He is well, and he is growing in wisdom, and I might almost say in grace, for he has taken the line of trying to circumvent the Prince by playing a waiting game, begging for time, and laying aside the defiant tone he had been fool enough to adopt a few months ago. So there is an end to Kronstadt."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Narka; "but when is there going to be an end of—the rest, I wonder? When will he be free? Will he ever be free?"

Ivan smiled, rubbed his palms together, and bent closer to her.

"I will tell you a secret," he said, dropping his voice to a confidential undertone. "There is a talk of the Emperor coming to pay a visit to his good brother of Berlin, and Prince Zorokoff is to accompany him, leaving Basil behind, well watched, of course; but we may outbid him, or we may outwit the police. I have a plan—" He chuckled, and squeezed his flattened hands between his knees as if he would have crushed them.

Narka held her breath; she could hardly trust herself to clutch at this splendid hope.

"Yes," Ivan continued, enjoying the effect he was producing; "we must smuggle him out across the Austrian frontier; then he will be safe; let them catch him if they can! It has been a good thing, this time he has spent at St. Petersburg; it has opened his eyes, and fitted him for the work that has to be done. When he was called back and put into a court dress he was in despair. He said: 'I had rather they sent me to Siberia to work naked at the gold picking! If one must be a slave, it is better to be naked than to be in livery; naked, one is nearer to being a man.' But it was a good thing they put him in livery; it made him feel how the livery galls and pinches and degrades the man; it has made him believe all that he heard. He now knows what a devil's workshop a court is! He has seen what an open door into hell it is! He now sees that the only thing to do is to burn it down, and scatter the dust of it to the winds of heaven! He has carried the war into the enemy's country; he has done wonders for the cause; his brain is a forge where the iron is made hot, and his pen a hammer that beats it and sends the sparks flying in every direction; his hand has grown strong and his nerves tough, and his arm knows where to reach."

Ivan clinched his own hand and straightened out his massive arm threateningly. He had grown excited as he went on, till his voice was hoarse, and murderous hate was visible in every line of his haggard face, and he was horrible to look at.

Narka knew not what to make of it. The sudden outbreaking of fierce passion was the more startling from its contrast with his habitual quiet *bonhomie;* she had never dreamed of such fires smouldering beneath the surface of Ivan's gentle nature; she admired the strength that it revealed, but she was conscious of a recoil from him; a kind of chill horror crept over her, as if she were being forced into tacit complicity with some criminal conspiracy, or some deed of blood.

He, concentrated in his own passion, had not noticed its effect upon her; but her long silence, after he had done speaking, recalled him to himself. "Tell me about you," he said, turning to her, and his countenance changed suddenly, as if he had thrown off a mask. "Why did you come to this out-of-the-way place? What are you doing up here?"

She answered his inquiries by giving him the history of all that had happened since they met; for he had left Paris just as she was pronounced out of danger, and had heard of her recovery from Schenk; but beyond that he knew nothing.

"You are with us at heart," he said, when she had finished; "why not be with us in action? You said you were ready for any work that your hands or head could do."

"What work can they do?" Narka asked, in vague alarm.

"You could translate for us. Instead of starving on the drudgery of lessons, you might earn an easy liveli-

hood by translating our circulars and pamphlets from Russian and German into French. We can pay well for good service, and I could keep you supplied with work." He plunged his hand into a capacious breast pocket, pulled out a roll of manuscript, unfolded it, and deliberately flattened it out on his knee.

Narka suddenly changed color. "That is Basil's writing!" she cried, putting out her hand to seize the paper.

"It is his writing, and it is his composition. I risked my head travelling with it. If it had been found, it would have been as good as a charge of dynamite under my chair." He handed her the paper.

Narka devoured the well-known writing with hungry eyes; it was almost like seeing Basil himself, like touching his hand.

Ivan's face, as he watched her, reflected transparently the battle of courage against pain that was being fought out within him; his brow contracted, while a smile of infantine hilarity made his eyes shine. After watching her for a moment he looked away, as if he could bear it no longer.

"There is to be a meeting on the 15th," he said, fumbling in his pockets, "and I want to have that ready to distribute at it; so set to work and translate it at once. By-the-way, why should not you come to this meeting? You would learn something of what is being done; you would hear what Basil is doing, and see the position he holds among us."

"I should like greatly to go," Narka said, looking up from the manuscript with a certain hesitation. Her will was, in truth, pulled by opposite forces of terror and desire; she longed to be useful in the cause for which Basil was risking his life and liberty, but she shrank before the mystery that hung like a black curtain be-

tween her and the means and agencies it employed. Who were these people she was going to associate herself with? Desperadoes, probably, who shrank from nothing. Still, if they were Basil's fellow-workers—

"I will come and fetch you," said Ivan, his quick eye detecting the conflict in her mind; "we can go in together, and you can come away whenever you feel inclined. We sha'n't be more than a few score."

And so it was settled that she would go.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

THE meeting was to be held in the Quartier Latin, close to the Russian Library. On the appointed evening Ivan called for Narka, and they drove there in a cab. It drew up before an old-fashioned gateway, and Ivan led the way up a dark, slippery stair to an entresol, where they entered a low-ceiled room lighted with gas. The artificial glare, after the golden light of the summer evening, had a sinister effect, and lent an additional air of mystery to the place and the opportunity, which impressed Narka's excited imagination.

There were about a dozen persons already present, some of them women. Every eye was turned on her, and the women looked eager to claim acquaintance; but Ivan Gorff, after exchanging greetings with the men he knew, sat down beside her, placing his chair so as to barricade her against approach, and then engaged her in confidential talk. The room filled quickly; still they seemed to be waiting for some one who had not yet arrived. Presently the door opened, and Dr. Schenk appeared. It was not a pleasant surprise to Narka; but it was not as disagreeable as it might have been under other circumstances. She did not like Schenk, though she was grateful to him for the care he had taken of her in her illness; but she was glad to see him make his way round and take a seat beside her. His presence seemed a protection. Never had she found herself amidst such an assembly of vulgar, vicious, desperate-

looking human beings as those who composed this meeting. The first impression of mistrust was gradually giving way to one of horror and amazement. They were all talking at the top of their voices, gesticulating in an excited manner; they seemed to be discussing every subject under the sun, if incoherent remarks and wild rant could be called discussion; it was difficult to believe such an assembly could have any serious purpose in view, or that the members were capable of wise and concerted action. When it was ascertained that the meeting was full, the door was locked, and some one stamped on the floor and then knocked on the table, and clamored for silence in order that the speaking might begin.

The first speaker was an elderly Russian, a tall, massively built man, with a quantity of black beard growing all over his face, and through this his sharp, rat-like eyes and exceedingly red nose peered like live things through a jungle. He read some reports from distant members, scarcely intelligible to Narka, but evidently of interest to the company. The speaker alluded proudly to his having been fifteen years at the hulks—a fact which evidently gave him a standing, as one entitled by experience to hold a heavy brief against the tyrants. The time had come, he said, for overturning that great collective tyrant called Society, and the work demanded stout hearts and steady hands. The stamping and applause which emphasized this remark left no doubt as to the assent of the hearts and hands of the company.

"Those," continued the speaker, when quiet was restored, "who possess what by right belongs to humanity call our work crime, and hunt us down. But if we are guilty, who are the true criminals? If our deeds are bloody, on whose head will be the blood we shed? They

goad us to madness, and when we strike in self-defence they call us robbers and assassins; they murder us in the name of justice!"

The old convict went ranting on in the same style, his voice growing louder as he proceeded, until it reached a shout; his gestures, at first heavy and emphatic, grew rapid and vehement, till his Herculean arms leaped and lashed about like the wings of a mill blown this way and that by contrary winds.

Ivan Gorff joined in the general applause, laughing and clapping hands as if the whole thing had been a clever farce. Schenk sat with his arms crossed, impassive and silent.

The next speaker was a very different type. He also was Russian, but young (about thirty), with a battered, consumptive countenance, and faded blond coloring; he was nobly born, had ruined himself by gambling, and been driven from sheer want into the business of patriotism; but he attributed his misfortune to the evil influences of the court—he had once succeeded in getting an invitation to a state ball at the Winter Palace—and felt that his destiny was to denounce the foul corruption of courts and the vices of kings, and to serve the noble cause of revolution by holding himself up as an awful example. He was interrupted by fits of coughing, and the intervals were filled with frantic applause from the meeting.

"It is some consolation to know," he continued, "that others are carrying on the war in the very heart of the citadel, and fighting in the foul atmosphere of courts against those infernal agencies. One of our countrymen is giving a glorious example of self-sacrifice and courage in propagating the gospel of Hate under the roof of the tyrant, and mining the ground under his

feet. My friend and heroic brother in arms, Basil Zorokoff—"

A faint, inarticulate cry from a corner of the room was instantly drowned in a loud and prolonged burst of applause from Ivan Gorff, and this was the signal for a general storm of enthusiasm, before which the consumptive speaker, already exhausted, collapsed.

The hubbub might have lasted indefinitely if Schenk had not risen, and, with one hand in his breast, and the other uplifted to command silence, made evident his intention to speak. The effect was immediate. The clamorous tongues were hushed, and silence reigned in the room. Schenk spoke with a quiet power that was impressive; his accent was slightly German; his voice clear and distinct; his speech simple and direct, like that of a man who is too sure of the strength of his subject to care to borrow any aid from rhetoric or gesticulation.

"We are a company of martyrs," he said, "self-elected victims in the great cause of Humanity. Let every man keep this grand ideal well before him. Our duty is to annihilate self in the service of the general good. The claims of the universal brotherhood must swallow up every other claim. Every creed and code and prejudice must succumb at their bidding. In the interests of our noble cause we must be ready, at mid-day or at midnight, to sacrifice self. We must be ready to do and to suffer things hard and vile and hideous. The men and women who join us must hold their lives in their hands, and be ready to fling them away at an hour's notice. They must be prepared to suffer hunger and thirst, to endure heat and cold, to give their flesh to the iron and the scourge, and their good name to the dogs; to be accursed by their kindred; to be accounted

infamous by the good and virtuous; to be alone in life and in death. All this they must be ready to accept who cast in their lot with us. If there be any among us whose spirit quails before the prospect, let him go no farther, but leave us before it be too late. Let no man or woman who cannot face with unflinching nerve the issues that await them run the risk of betraying the cause, and incurring the traitor's death."

Schenk paused, as if waiting for an answer. It came in a loud shout of assent from every side. With a quiet gesture he imposed silence, and went on:

"If we are all sure of ourselves, we need fear nothing. No man can hurt us. They can do no more than kill us, and we are willing to be killed. However black in the eyes of men, we are white and clean before Heaven and our own conscience. And we stand all equal as servants in the grand cause. The lowest among us who runs the same risks, deserves the same honor as the Prince who is working in the high places. The only standard we recognize is patriotism; the value of each man is measured by the service he renders to the general cause."

Schenk then proceeded to read letters and reports; but Narka did not hear them. She was reeling from the shock that his speech had dealt her; she felt like a person who had been led blindfold into a quagmire, and who, when the bandage was removed, saw no way out of it. What could Ivan's motive have been in leading her into such a place? He had, indeed, prepared her vaguely by mysterious hints; but she never dreamed of anything so reckless of morality as this policy expounded by Schenk. And it looked as if Schenk had seized with avidity the opportunity of lighting up the depths of the abyss on the brink of which she stood, and

showing her what kind of solidarity she incurred and what risks she ran in throwing in her lot with him and his associates. And these men were Basil's friends! It was impossible! Yet there was his pamphlet. True, it did not contain anything like Schenk's cold-blooded gospel of crime; it was only an eloquent appeal to his countrymen to rise and assert their dignity as men, and their freedom as citizens; it dealt with abstract ideas and principles.

Narka in her bewilderment could not, perhaps would not, see that Schenk's concrete code was only the logical outcome of Basil's abstract principles. Suddenly the thought of Larchoff flashed through her mind. She felt sick with doubt and terror.

Schenk sat down, and then Olga Borzidoff rose to speak. This woman was a friend of Dr. Schenk's, and had kept her eyes on Narka from the first with a glance which, if Narka had noticed it, would have frightened her more than anything she had seen or heard at the meeting. Olga Borzidoff, after draining the cup of pleasure to the dregs, had taken to the game of patriotism in search of a new sensation; but she played badly, got caught, and only escaped with her life, owing to a timely warning from one of the Emperor's aides-de-camp. Her fortune was confiscated, but the sale of her jewels gave her an income which enabled her to play the *grande dame* amongst the bankrupt pariahs into whose society she had fallen. She had once been handsome, but now at forty she was a bold, hard-featured, painted coquette.

She opened her speech by an attack on men, denouncing the despotism they exercised over women, and declaring that the emancipation of her sex must be a prelude to the emancipation of her country and man-

kind, and that her efforts and those of her sisters should tend in that direction. A violent, ranting rigmarole.

After this shrieking sister, a pale-faced, blue-eyed German stood up. She acknowledged that she was a woman, timid and cowardly, and therefore had no right to put herself forward; still, trusting to the chivalrous indulgence of the stronger sex, she dared to lift up her voice and adjure them to make haste in their grand mission of social reform; their action had hitherto been circumscribed by scruples of compassion which were in reality the promptings of cowardice. They shrank from sacrificing harmless men and women, forgetting that the death of one tyrant was such a gain to humanity as to be cheaply bought by the sacrifice of a thousand lives; it would benefit millions yet unborn. Let this thought nerve their arm for the slaughter that must be accomplished if the world was to be cleansed of the race of tyrants and aristocrats, etc., etc., etc.

The blue-eyed woman's voice had a lachrymose tremble in it that was full of pathos. It reminded Narka of the serpent beseeching Eve to eat to the death of the human race.

Several other speakers followed; chiefly French, all young men, evidently of the *déclassé* type. One after another they stood up and raved and ranted; they were full of their own importance, ready for any enterprise, absolutely reckless of consequences; light-headed fools, seemingly more hungry and discontented than wicked—a wonderful company to undertake the redemption of their respective nations.

Ivan Gorff had not spoken, except that short parley improvised to screen Narka when she had nearly betrayed herself. He rose now, and said he had something to communicate before they separated. There was a gen-

eral assent, and he proceeded to read out, in his deep, metallic voice, Basil's pamphlet translated. The effect was electric. The language had seemed inspiring to Narka when she read it alone; but, declaimed by Ivan to this excited and responsive audience, its eloquence was like fire and dancing flames. The reading was all along punctuated by "bravos" and suppressed cheers; the meeting could hardly restrain its enthusiasm within bounds, and the moment Ivan had done, the applause burst out like a torrent let loose. The pamphlets were seized upon as if they had been loaves of bread thrown to starving men; the company embraced one another; they kissed the pamphlet; they made every demonstration of wild delight.

Under cover of the general hubbub Ivan said to Narka, "Let us slip away."

Schenk, who was before her, moved on at once, and Olga Borzidoff, whose eyes had never left the group, pushed quickly toward the door and met them.

"Present us to one another," she said to Schenk, putting her hand on his arm; but Schenk moved on as if he had not heard. "Let us introduce ourselves," said Olga. "I am Olga Borzidoff. What is our new sister's name?"

"Narka Larik," replied the new sister, coldly.

Ivan pushed her gently on, remarking that it was later than he thought. It was pitch-dark on the stairs. Schenk struck a match, and nursed the little flame, that Narka might see where to step; but the light, after a moment, went out.

"Take my arm," said Schenk. "I know the way. I will guide you."

They were groping their way, Ivan following, when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a woman's voice said, "I want a word with you." He stood at her bidding.

Narka got safe down, thanks to Schenk's steady guidance. When they emerged into the court below, the moon was high and the dark blue heaven was full of stars.

"Here we are, *a riveder le stelle!*" he said, drawing a deep breath.

In spite of the horror with which his speech had so lately inspired her, Narka for a moment felt in sympathy with him; the beautiful quotation seemed to strike a *sursum corda* that lifted her spirit out of the dense atmosphere in which she had been morally and physically stifling.

They stood and looked back, expecting Ivan to follow; but he did not appear, and the others were hurrying down.

"We had better not wait here," said Schenk. "Come on, and I will put you into a cab."

They went out, and he hailed one. As he was closing the door upon Narka, he said, "It is very late for you to go such a long drive alone; you had better let me see you home." And without waiting for her answer, he jumped in beside her.

Neither of them broke silence until they alighted at Narka's door. Then Schenk wished her good-night, and walked back alone in the starlight.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE meeting in the Quartier Latin had one good effect on Narka: it forced her thoughts into a new channel, and made it easier for her to obey the doctor's injunction of thinking as little as possible about her lost voice. That extraordinary scene, and the sudden and dangerous current it had introduced into her life, absorbed her so completely that all other thoughts were for the moment crowded out of sight. But she felt more alone since her solitude had become peopled by this multitude of unbidden presences. A new sense of loneliness, of isolation, came to her with the longing to discount these too vivid emotions, to silence these haunting revelations and shadowy presentments by sharing them with some one whom she could trust, and who would understand, whose sympathy or whose contradiction, whose indignant denunciation even, might help her to adjust the balance of things, and bring them to their true proportion. It is so much harder to battle through these spectral crowds alone!

Narka tried to escape from her beleaguered solitude by occupying herself, and being as much as possible out-of-doors. One of the few helpful recreations within her reach was a visit to the Louvre. She took the omnibus one morning and drove there. The serene atmosphere of the galleries soothed her, the brooding presence of the dead masters, who were still so living, exorcised the evil spirits and scared them away. Narka had never held a brush, but her delight in the art was

genuine. She loved some of the pictures as if they were living persons who felt her enthusiasm, and might be touched by it. The Murillos were her chief delight; sometimes it almost seemed to her that she might awake or trouble the sleep of the dead painter in being so deeply moved by his inspired renderings. She lingered long before them to-day, and though tired physically from standing about so many hours, she felt refreshed and rested in spirit when she left the place.

She was turning into the Tuileries gardens when a gentleman, hurrying out, met her. It was Dr. Schenk. Narka had not seen either him or Ivan Gorff since the meeting.

"I am so glad to meet you!" he said, cordially. "Shall we sit down and chat for a moment?"

There was a bench close by, under the broad shade of a chestnut-tree. Narka was not sorry to sit down and rest a little.

"I need not ask what you thought of the company the other evening," Schenk said, entering at once on the subject.

Narka's level brows went up expressively. "It was not so much the company, even, as the doctrines, that took me by surprise," she answered.

"You were not prepared to find them so advanced? Ivan ought to have been more outspoken and explicit with you. You were hardly strong enough to bear the shock of being brought in contact with the reality so suddenly. I took for granted that you had come there with your eyes open, and I was surprised to see you, I confess. However, as you have been taken behind the curtain, you must just accept the fact that there is an ugly side to patriotism when it has to work in secret. But though the patriotism that goes forth to the roll of

drums and the braying of trumpets looks a more respectable thing, it is far less worthy in reality than ours, that gets no reward but scorn and stripes; we at least despise the conventional fallacy that goes by the name of honor; we trample that cant and the rest of the world's jugglery and caricaturing under our feet, and we bring on ourselves the odium of the result for a purely impersonal gain. I perceive you have a great deal to learn as to our principle of action," he added, reading, with his habitual intuition, on Narka's features the conflict between utter revulsion and reluctant admiration that he was exciting in her; "you have taken a perilous step in joining us, but you will trust me and let me be your friend—"

"I hope our new sister will trust us all as friends," said a woman's voice behind them.

Before turning round to see who it was, Narka had recognized Olga Borzidoff. She started and colored.

Schenk stood up. "What brings you here?" he said, in a low tone that had something dangerously fierce in it.

"Precisely what brings you here," she replied, in a high, insolent key: "the desire to converse with Mademoiselle Larik."

"I had business to discuss with mademoiselle."

"So have I. Perhaps you won't mind our discussing it together?"

"Good-morning, monsieur," said Narka, and quivering with anger and wounded pride, she walked away.

That bold, bad woman's stare was like the touch of an unclean thing. She could not forgive Ivan Gorff for subjecting her to the humiliation of such a contact. Why had he entrapped her so treacherously into this secret congregation of disreputable men and women?

What sort of good were such people capable of effecting for their country? And Basil was working in common with them!

All the way to La Villette, as the omnibus rolled along, Narka protested inwardly against this unworthy comradeship, and upbraided Ivan Gorff. But on reaching home she found that Ivan had called and left a sealed parcel for her. She opened it and saw Basil's handwriting. In an instant all her anger vanished, and she could feel nothing but gratitude toward the man who had brought this joy into her life.

She sat down and devoured the manuscript. It was just what she wanted to restore her bruised self-respect and reconcile her to the irreconcilable. The article was a powerful and impassioned piece of writing; but it remained, like the preceding one, in the abstract, dealing with principles, and enlarging on the degrading effect of tyranny upon the moral nature of a people. Here was the wisdom, the sagacity, the courage, the dominant mind of the true patriot. This was the gold in the dross. Narka set to work at once on the translation, happy in the consciousness that she was putting her hand to the plough with Basil, and driving the share through the smoking soil, while he cast the seed into the furrow.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

Narka had not been to see Marguerite since the meeting. If any one had asked her why, she would have said it was because she had been busy, or absent at Marguerite's convenient hours for seeing her. But the true though unacknowledged reason was that she shrank from the contact. Marguerite's pure and uncompromising orthodoxies somehow always rebuked her like a living conscience; and now that her mind had become tainted with guilty knowledge, and was tacitly, half-consciously, conniving at it, she did not dare intrude herself on a life that was filled from morning till night with placid sanctities, sweet and common as daisies in the grass, and wholesome as a field of new-mown hay. She was afraid to meet those true, innocent eyes that were bubbling up with happiness and trust in God and man, like clear fountains in the sunlight. She avoided Marguerite since she had set her foot upon the downward path. For Narka knew that it was a downward path. Those articles of Basil's had fanned the flame of her love and fired her imagination, but they had not blinded her reason. She saw clearly enough the logical link between those blood-stirring appeals and the doctrines enunciated at the meeting.

Marguerite, meantime, was too busy to go to people who were able to come to her. She heard from Madame Blaquette that Narka was well and out every day, and this was enough. She had, moreover, heavier cares than usual pressing on her for the moment. La Villette was "nervous"; in other words, it was making ready

for a revolution. The elders of the community, enlightened by past experiences, recognized signs and symbols which Marguerite's quick intuition could not have failed, even without this warning, to notice. The district echoed with sounds and silences that were not to be mistaken. The wine-shops were crowded late and early, and through their closed doors there came reverberations of that alcoholic oratory which to the Parisian *ouvrier* is like a lighted match put to powder. A more significant sign to Marguerite was that the orators avoided her. She noticed that men who habitually met her with a bright kindly word now turned round the corner when they saw her in the distance, or, if they came up with her unexpectedly, hurried on with a curt salutation. Clearly they were fighting shy of her, and she read the reason in their sullen averted faces and in the troubled eyes of the women.

Madame Blaquette, whom Narka frequently met coming in and out, seemed much alarmed, and hinted at some great impending catastrophe; but Madame Blaquette was so well known as a croaker and an alarmist that no one paid any heed to what she said. One afternoon she came against Narka in the entry, and clutched her arm in great excitement: "Oh, mademoiselle, we have had the narrowest escape! Just think! The house opposite is watched by the police, and such odd-looking people have been hanging about! Three days ago a box was brought to a man who lodged there a month back. They wouldn't take it in, so the porter carried it over here, and said if I kept it for a couple of days it would be called for. I, never suspecting anything, took it into my room, and this morning it suddenly occurred to me that it might be an infernal machine!"

"Oh!" cried Narka, with a gesture of dismay.

"I went off at once to the commissaire de police, and he went to the Préfecture, and three men came just now and carried it into the back yard, and took all *sorts* of precautions in opening, for if it had exploded, you know, the whole street would have blown up!"

"But it didn't explode?"

"Oh no; it was a sewing-machine. But only think if it had been the other!"

"But it wasn't the other," said Narka, half amused, and half vexed at having been so taken in.

"All the same, we have been most mercifully preserved," insisted Madame Blaquette, "for it *might* have been the other, and I might have been buried at this moment under the ruins of my own roof. We ought to be on our knees thanking God."

Narka, with an impatient shrug, passed on, laughing, into her room. As she took off her things she looked out at the house opposite. It was a dingy, disreputable looking house, with a battered face, and windows so crusted with dirt you could not have seen through them—a house that looked as if it might want watching; but probably there was as much foundation for its bad character as for the providential escape from the sewing-machine.

She was turning from the window, when she observed an unusual movement outside; a number of *gamins* were rushing to stare at something; presently an open carriage with liveried servants drew up before her door. Flushed and excited, she went to receive Sibyl.

"Oh, my darling, what a funny place you have come to!" exclaimed Sibyl, looking round her like a person bewildered.

"Yes," said Narka, with a constrained laugh, "it is

a funny place for you to come to pay a visit. I wonder what your servants think of it?"

"My servants? I should as soon think of wondering what my horses thought of it!"

Narka laughed again. "Yes," she said to herself, "horses and servants are the same sort of cattle to you, only with different prices."

They sat down, Sibyl glancing round her with a kind of half-alarmed curiosity.

"Do you know, I am very angry with you," she said. "What business had you to steal a march on me and come off to this outlandish place the moment my back was turned?"

"I was obliged to come away; I could not remain where I was."

"You might have gone down to Beaucrillon and waited there. Have you made a vow never to come and stay with me?"

Narka made no answer for a moment. Then looking at Sibyl with an expression half grave, half comical, "Do you remember," she said, "how we laughed over that remark of Madame de Staël's, that a woman who was unhappy with her husband ought never to leave him for a day, because it made it so much worse for her when she had to come back to him?"

"Where is the bad husband here?" said Sibyl, glancing round as if she half expected to see him hiding somewhere. "Have you gone and married unbeknown to me?"

"The husband is only a figure," replied Narka. "The fact is, the contrast between my life and yours is too great, the charm and splendor of your home make the hurry-scurry and sordid vulgarities of my own look worse to me. I have made up my mind

not to risk it, not to try to snatch at what has been so completely taken from me. It is much better for me to stay in my own corner and toil and moil, and never try to escape, and put on my silk gown and sit idle like a lady. I feel such a sham when I go to you and play the lady!"

"What nonsense you are talking! You are a sham when you try not to play the lady, as you call it. Your ladyhood is as inalienable as the shape of your eyes or the color of your hair. I don't know what you mean by sordid vulgarity; a life of intellectual labor is not sordid or vulgar. It has always seemed to me a grand thing to owe everything to one's self. I should have been very proud if I could have earned my own living."

The sentiment was sublimely absurd in Sibyl's mouth, and yet it did Narka good to hear her speak so. It raised her in her own eyes to hear Sibyl say that working for bread was a grand thing. There was still a virtue in Sibyl's touch that was like nothing else.

They talked about other things, and then Sibyl said: "And Marguerite? You see her often? How is she?"

"I hope she is well, for she works like a little pony. She is goodness itself to me."

"I am so glad, darling! But Marguerite is an angel."

"I knew that already; but I have discovered here that she is a genius. She would have made a first-rate queen. She has a genius for governing. If you could see how she manages the roughs and the drunkards! The people positively worship her; there are all sorts of stories abroad about the miracles Sœur Marguerite works; how she multiplies the soup and the rations beyond all natural explanation. Where she gets the money for all she gives away in food and clothing is certainly a kind of miracle."

"Oh, she is not a bad beggar!" said Sibyl, laughing; "her genius extends in that direction too. I must go in and see her on my way home." Then, taking Narka's hand in her own, "But tell me about your voice, dearest?" she said, anxiously; "I have been haunted by the thought ever since I heard from Marguerite that you had lost it. How I did long to fly to you that moment and hold your hand while you were passing through that terrible anguish of the first discovery! But it is sure to come back. Have you tried it since then?"

Before Narka could answer, there was a quick tap at the window, which was only a few feet from the ground outside, and something like a great white wing fluttered past.

"It is Marguerite," said Narka; and, doubly glad of the interruption, she went to let her in.

The cornette seemed to bring in the sunshine with it.

"I guessed who was responsible for the scandal of a powdered flunky in this respectable neighborhood," said Marguerite. "Who ever thought of your ladyship's being in town at this time of year? Business? Well, Narka is not so badly off, you see?" and she glanced admiringly round the room, to which, in spite of its tiled floor and whitewashed walls, the grand piano under its rich embroidered cover, and flowers and books about, gave a gracious, home-like air.

"If the outside were only as good as the inside. But what an awful neighborhood it is!" said Sibyl, lifting up her hands. "As I drove up here the wickedness of the people's faces, the way they scowled at me, made me shudder."

"You need not have shuddered," said Marguerite, with a little toss of her head. "The worst of our people

up here is they are not hypocrites; they wear their wickedness outside instead of in; but half the time it is pain that makes them scowl, poor creatures! When hunger is griping a man's inside, it is enough to make him scowl. I'm sure it would me."

"You always stand up for your people here," said Sibyl, "but you know very well, dear, they are the scum of the city."

"I know nothing of the sort; they may be the dregs, but they certainly are not the scum—the scum is at the top. You must look to our *monde* for that."

"We don't get drunk, at any rate."

"Humph!" Marguerite remembered certain *traits de mœurs* she had heard at Yrakow, and admired Sibyl's impudence. "Perhaps it would be better for them if they did," she said, defiantly. "I know a few respectable Pharisees whom I should love to make so drunk that they would roll under the table. That might take the pride out of them, and send them up to the Temple to strike their breasts and get justified."

Narka burst out laughing. "The Pharisees get no quarter from Marguerite," she said.

Sibyl looked half inclined to be angry. "Well, if she is fond of publicans, I should think she is satisfied up here. The shouts and yells from the wine-shops as I came along were perfectly awful. It reminded me of the shrieks of the damned."

"That can't be a pleasant noise," said Marguerite; "but I would rather hear that than the laughter of the damned."

"I did not know they ever laughed in hell."

"I fancy they do now and then; I fancy that when the Pharisees are stripped of their shams and shown up naked at the judgment-seat, their countenances on find-

ing themselves in that predicament must be a sight to make even the poor devils laugh."

"The poor devils? Well, if you are going to stand up for the devils!"

"It would be a good thing for us if we had their zeal and their perseverance," retorted Marguerite.

"You need not envy them their spirit of contradiction, at any rate," said Sibyl, good-humoredly, feeling that she had made a hit.

"Give it up, Sibyl—give it up," said Narka, triumphing with Marguerite, who had had the best of it up to this.

But Marguerite had not thought of triumphing; she only thought of defending her poor people. "What news have you from St. Petersburg?" she asked, turning the conversation.

Sibyl slowly lifted her shoulders, and with a sigh slowly let them down. "I'm afraid my father is growing weak. Basil has persuaded him to wait and give him time to live down his foolish passion. I fear Basil has entangled himself deeper, and in more ways than we suspected. And he has broken through all restraint with my father, and rails against the tyranny of the Emperor and the miserable condition of the people, and goes on like a lunatic. The wonder is that my father bears it. But the wonder of all is that any one so clever as Basil can be such a fool! As if our moujiks wanted to be free! As if they would know what to do with themselves if they were sent adrift to-morrow like English or French peasants! To give them perfect freedom would be to make them miserable."

"My dear Sibyl," Narka protested, with a ringing laugh, "would a lark be miserable if you opened its cage and set it free?"

"Yes, it would, if it had been born in a cage. That is what you and Basil don't consider." (How that "you and Basil" made Narka's heart leap!) "Human beings, like animals, are only happy in the conditions they are born to. A savage is happy in savage conditions; our civilized ways would be misery to him. Fancy a red Indian, roaming through his forests in a bead necklace, suddenly trapped, and his free limbs packed into pantaloons and top-boots!"

"We Russians are not quite red Indians," said Narka. "We have been slowly educated up to top-boots these fifty years past."

"*Un*fortunately!" said Sibyl, with intense emphasis. "Our people were much happier before they ever heard of top-boots. They were content with their lot, just as the camel that toils all his life through the desert is content; but if you bring a camel up as a pet to eat and drink and lie in the shade, and then load him and turn him out into the desert to tramp without water under a vertical sun, do you think he would be content?"

"He would be a great fool if he were. But what does that prove?—that the majority of human beings ought to be treated like camels?"

"They ought not to be unfitted for their allotted work."

"Allotted? Who allotted it? When God created the world did He allot the millions as camels to the tens? Did He authorize you to treat the people as cattle?"

"I don't think we ever treated our people as cattle," said Sibyl, surprised and resentful.

"You did not; but others around you did, and you might if you had chosen. I don't believe God ever meant to place the majority of His children in jeopardy to that choice."

There was a passionate vibration in Narka's voice that reminded Sibyl how cruelly the choice had been used against her kindred. The remembrance smote Sibyl's heart, if not her conscience. There was an awkward silence, when Marguerite exclaimed: "Good gracious! is that three o'clock? I had only meant to stay ten minutes, and you have beguiled me into wasting twenty! Dear Sibyl, you will be interested to hear that I am as poor as a rat, and ready for any spare cash you may want to get rid of. I just mention it in case you should not like to ask me. Now I must be off!" She kissed her and hurried away.

"Where is she going in such a hurry?" inquired Sibyl, when Narka returned, after having closed the door.

"She is gone to dress the wound of a carter whose leg was smashed under a stone, and then amputated. It is a frightful case. Marguerite dresses the wound twice a day."

Sibyl shuddered. "It is extraordinary how hard Marguerite has grown; she can stand by without wincing, and look on at those horrors, while the very sight of blood makes me sick! But it is much better for one's self and others not to be so tender-hearted. I should think the atmosphere of this place, with such misery all about as Marguerite describes, must be very bad for you, Narka, it is so depressing? And you want to be cheered up. Now I look at you, my darling, you seem very tired. I am sure you are overworking yourself. You want rest. You ought to be lying down this minute. I wish I could stay and put you on the sofa and read to you for an hour. Have you any nice books?"—she glanced round at the table. "When I come back I will *insist* on your letting me take care of you." She stood

up, and looked into Narka's great pathetic blue-black eyes, and then opened her arms.

Narka let herself sink into the loved embrace which had so long been her haven of sweetest rest; but suddenly she recollected how that soft little hand had clutched an imaginary knout and cut open in desire the flesh of the woman whom Basil loved. The recollection made her blood run cold, and she drew herself away from the clasping arms.

All this time a crowd of *gamins* were collected at the door outside, staring at the grand equipage and chaffing the fine flunky. When the owner of this splendor came out they ceased their chaffing, and stood in silence, watching the ceremony of her getting into the carriage and sinking back on the cushions, while the fine flunky arranged her silken skirts, the glossy thorough-breds meantime tossing their heads and pawing the ground, and giving every sign of impatience and disgust. Finally they moved on, spurning the stones contemptuously, and striking sparks with their steel hoofs—a comical parody on human impudence and conceit admirably performed by well-bred beasts.

As the carriage with its liveries and emblazoned panels jolted lightly down the roughly paved street, the pageant drew gazers to doors and windows, and Sibyl again passed under the fire of those sullen glances which to her betokened the excess of wickedness. Clearly these people needed to be held down with a hand of iron.

Narka watched the carriage out of sight from the doorstep. As she was turning in she saw Madame Blaquette standing in the middle of the street, and earnestly gazing into the palm of her hand.

"God direct me!" ejaculated the landlady, in a voice

evidently intended to reach Narka. Then, looking up: "Oh! it is you, mademoiselle! I was just considering whether I ought to bestow an alms on this poor woman or not; she *looks* deserving, but I may be deceived."

"As you have taken out the penny, I think I would bestow it," replied Narka.

"That is *precisely* what I feel about it. Then, in God's name, I will risk it!" She presented the penny to the beggar, who had been patiently waiting while her fate was discussed.

Narka glanced at her and noticed that she wore green spectacles, and a bandage over one side of her surprisingly red face. "I should not have said that she looked deserving," was Narka's reflection as she turned indoors; "but I don't suppose Madame Blaquette's penny will do her much harm."

## CHAPTER XXX.

It may have been fancy, but when Narka went out next morning it certainly did strike her that there was something abnormal in the looks of the people and the atmosphere of the place. But she set it down to the effect of Sibyl's shudderings and denunciations, and turned away from the idea. Moreover, her own nerves, she knew, were always at full stretch, generally beyond it, and it was always safe to distrust her own impressions. She bethought her that she would go down to the House and hear what they said there.

"Was Sibyl dreaming, or did she really smell brimstone in the air yesterday?" asked Narka, walking into the dispensary, where Marguerite was pounding herbs in a mortar.

"I'm afraid she smelt something," Marguerite replied, without looking up. "I wish you had gone away with her."

"I would not have gone if she had asked me; but she did not ask me."

Marguerite made no comment to this, but went on with her pounding.

"Oh, Marguerite, what a fool I have been all my life!" Narka burst out, passionately. "I see now Sibyl never cared a straw for me. She never loved me a bit, and she has been feeding me on false sacraments of love all my life!"

"Mon Dieu! how you do exaggerate everything!" said Marguerite, looking up and tossing her head. "You

are so terribly morbid that you turn everything in life to tragedy."

"And what has life been to me but a tragedy ever since I can remember? It is easy for you to preach, but it is enough to drive me mad to see how little Sibyl cares about me! To hear her talking sentimental stuff about longing to hold my hand, when all this time she never asked how I managed not to starve! Good God! if I were in her place and she in mine! But I am a fool—a fool!" she repeated, passionately.

"Yes," said Marguerite, with uncivil acquiescence, while her cornette bobbed in merry accompaniment to the pestle; "you were a fool when you made an idol of a creature; and, as I told you before, it is the tumbling down of your idol that is hurting you so terribly. You expect too much from Sibyl, because you gave her more than you ought to have given to any human creature."

"Not near as much as you have given."

"I?"

"Yes, you; you have given everything to your fellow-creatures—your time, your energies, your whole life. I never gave as much as that to Sibyl."

The pestle stopped, and Marguerite looked up in amazement.

"But I have not given that to creatures. I have given it to God. That is just what makes the difference."

There was no answer to this. It shifted the ground of the argument too far. After a moment's silence Narka said, "And so you think there is going to be an *émeute?*"

"I am afraid there is something brewing. One feels the throbbing of the kettle before it boils over." Marguerite laid her open hand downward on the air, as if touching water.

"Does it break out all in a moment like that?"

"So they tell me. Our Sisters have seen terrible explosions, just like gunpowder. The men go down into the streets and fight; barricades start up in every direction as if by magic, and then there is firing and slaughtering, and the seven devils are let loose and the people go mad; first their heads go mad, and then their hearts."

"Do hearts go mad, dear?"

"I think they must. I do believe that hatred creates madness, just as fever does when it gets to one's head. And it is so much harder to cure a mad heart than a mad head! Hatred is such a malignant force! Where it breaks out it devours everything; it is like fire. That is the dreadful thing in these revolutions; they are hatred in a state of combustion."

"Are you afraid the people will attack the House?"

"Oh no; they never hurt us. But a lot of our poor people will get into sad trouble. The police have been re-enforced, and the troops are consigned to the barracks, and swarms of detectives are prowling about the district. We have set the children to pray, two by two, in the church all day, and M. le Curé gave us leave to watch ourselves in prayer all to-night."

"Is it so near as all that?" Narka exclaimed, in surprise; "and you never said a word about it to me!"

"It was only this morning that we heard how alarmed the government was, and the stringent measures that are being taken."

Marguerite put aside the pestle and mortar, and took down from the wall the little basket she carried on her errands.

"You are going to visit some sick people? Let me come with you," said Narka.

"No; it is a case of small-pox; you had better go home. And if there be any movement in the streets to-morrow morning, stay in-doors. It may blow off, as these threats sometimes do; or it may be held down. But we shall soon know. *Au revoir*, dear."

They parted at the gate, and Narka went home. Now that her eyes had been opened to observe the signs of things that were coming, the rebellious element in the air had become distinctly sentient, and her pulses were quickened to sympathy with it. She, too, had wrongs to redress, and she was ready to side heart and soul with the people around her who were going to rebel and seek redress for theirs. She did not stop to ask whether these wrongs were real or not; she was in a mood to applaud rebellion; her whole heart went out in sympathy with it. These people, like her, were the victims of tyranny; they were politically free, but they were the slaves of those merciless tyrants, the rich; they were starved and exasperated to violence by the inexorable rapacity of the capitalists. This might be justice in the eyes of the law, but in the sight of God it was murder. In the sight of God the rich one had no more right to use the brute force of money against the poor man than the strong man to use the brute force of muscular strength against the helpless paralytic. But they arrogated the right, and this was the universal wrong that was crying out for vengeance all over the world.

The passion of revenge had been sleeping in Narka's heart, ready to wake up at the first opportunity. Time had not made less heinous in her eyes any of the wrongs that she had suffered, or weakened her sense of their injustice. Herein lies the vital difference between pain and evil; the flight of time, passing over pain, effaces

the very remembrance of it, and washes away the traces of suffering, but it leaves the memory of evil and the ruin it has made untouched; the lapse of years atones for nothing; forgetfulness is not remedial of guilt. It was not the fact of her father and brother having died in Siberia, of her mother lying in the graveyard at Yrakow —it was not these sorrows in themselves that rankled and festered in Narka's heart, making it burn for revenge and throb in passionate sympathy with rebellion; it was the fact that those deaths were the work of human cruelty and injustice. What could be done to better the world while these sinister powers of evil were ruling it? There was nothing but to rise up and destroy them.

She got out those articles of Basil's and read them. They were like the sound of martial music to her excited nerves. She was putting them away, when the concierge knocked at her door and handed in a letter. It was from Ivan. Was this news of Basil? Narka opened it eagerly. This is what Ivan said:

"On the 10th there will be a meeting at which some important news will be communicated. If you don't write to forbid me, I will meet you in the gallery of the Luxembourg on Friday at half past one, and we will go together."

This invitation would have been to Narka like the braying of the trumpet to the war-horse if she had not already been to one of the assemblies in question. She suspected the news was about Basil, but even this temptation could not lure her again into the company of Olga Borzidoff and the rest of them. She was ready to sympathize actively in every effort to overthrow tyrants, but she would rather go out and fight on the barricades, if barricades there were to be, than deliberately

come into contact with the people she had met before at one of these clandestine meetings. Besides, who could tell what might happen between this and the 10th? She went to bed late, and dreamed all night of Basil, of dangers shared with him, of hair-breadth escapes, of rescue at last, and then she awoke and found herself still alone, and life still a tragedy in which the romance of love had yet to be enacted.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

When Narka went out to make her little provisions next morning she perceived at once that there was a movement of some sort on foot. The people were out in the streets talking excitedly in groups. She asked a young workman what was the matter.

"The people have risen!" he said, triumphantly. "I have been helping at the barricades since daybreak; I have only run off to get a mouthful of food. We are going to have a *journée!* Keep in-doors, *ma belle citoyenne*—the troops are coming down the boulevards—unless you like to come and lend us a hand on the barricades."

He marched off in high good-humor, proud as a peacock; the women were looking after him; some like furies; others scared and anxious.

Narka hurried home, made a hasty meal, and put on her bonnet to go down to the House. As she opened her own door she saw Dr. Schenk on the threshold, with his hand on the bell.

"You are going out!" he said, in surprise.

"Yes; I am going to the Sisters' House. It seems there is an *émeute.*" She stood back, and he came in.

"Yes, a very serious *émeute.* You must not venture out into the streets; the firing may begin anywhere at any moment. I have come to take you away. You can't remain here in the midst of such danger. Put up what you want in a little bag, and come away at once. I have a cab waiting at the corner of the Rue X——;

we can get round through a back way." He spoke with quiet authority, just as when she had been his patient he had ordered her to do this or avoid that. Narka was bewildered.

"Where do you want to take me to?" she said.

Dr. Schenk looked at her in silence with a steady gaze that had something magnetic in it. Then, drawing a step nearer, "There is only one place where you can go with safety and dignity," he said; "that is your husband's house. Don't start, Narka; listen to me. I have loved you from the first hour we met. I did not come here to-day to tell you so; I should have been afraid it might have driven you from me. I knew you must be slowly won, and I was satisfied to wait. I would have waited seven years. But there is no time to wait now; I am driven to speak; it is the only way of rescuing you. I love you. Accept me for your husband, and I will trust to winning your love by the strength of my own, by the whole devotion of my life."

Narka had been too startled and surprised to speak.

"Why, I thought you knew?...." she said, hesitating, and her color rose and spread to a beautiful carmine. "Did not Ivan tell you? I am engaged to Basil Zorokoff."

"That is an idle dream," said Schenk, unmoved. "You will never be Zorokoff's wife."

"What do you mean?"

"He will never marry you; he does not love you."

"How dare you say that!" cried Narka, and the blue fire flashed from her eyes.

"He does not love you," Schenk repeated, in the same quiet tone. "If he loved you, he would not have left you all this time to work for your daily bread alone, battling with the perils and cruelties of want. Don't

tell me he could not help it. If he had loved you he would have helped it; but he loves nothing but ambition. He might have married you, from a sense of honor, if he had been his own master. But love you! Child, your love sweeps over him in a high tide of passion that he no more vibrates to than an oyster vibrates to the roll of the Atlantic!" The words were full of passion, but Schenk's voice was as cold and level as if he had been speaking on any ordinary subject; the fire in him was at white heat; but it did not appear; it was concentrated within. There was something unhuman in this cold-blooded self-command that repelled Narka indescribably, but it helped her to be calm.

"Dr. Schenk," she said, trying to keep her loathing out of her voice, "I will not forget that you have shown me great kindness; but I must remind you that nothing can justify your speaking of what is strictly and sacredly personal to me. I am as sure of the love of Basil Zorokoff as I am of mine for him. You are not capable of understanding a nature like his. He is too far above you."

Schenk smiled compassionately. "Keep your illusions," he said; "I don't want to destroy them; I only want to prevent them from destroying you. You are sacrificing your youth to a phantom. Zorokoff will never break through his present bonds to marry you. His own indifference is in league with the strong will of his father and his sister. Give up that dream! Worship him as a patriot, if you will, but give your love to me. I love you with my whole soul; I will be your slave all my life. You care nothing for the gauds that other women covet; but these too I can put at your feet; my fortune is ample. Be my wife, Narka, and let us work in the good cause together!" He held out

his hand to her, but she fell back with a gesture of denial. Schenk thought it expressed disgust. "My hand is clean; there is no man's blood upon it," he said, and there was a sinister gleam in his eye.

Narka, stung to the quick, flashed back at him a glance of hatred and defiance. "That taunt covers a cowardly lie!" she said; "but I am glad that you uttered it; it shows me your true character, and enables me to dismiss you without a shadow of regret. Go, and never cross my path again!"

She pointed to the door, but Schenk did not obey her. He turned away, and paced the room twice, three times; his head was bent, his right hand was thrust into his breast, his features were working convulsively. There was something terrible and pitiable in the sight of this sudden passion, in the agony of conflict that was going on within him. Narka, standing by the mantelpiece, watched him, divided between fear, anger, and a rising sense of pity. He had flung his love so generously at her feet, she felt sorry for him, in spite of those insolent and cruel words. Suddenly Schenk came and stood before her. The change that had taken place in him within the last few minutes was frightful to see; his sallow pallor had turned to a livid gray; there was a red line across his forehead, as if he had been struck with a lash. "Forgive me," he said, meekly; "I have behaved like a fool and a brute. My love for you must be my excuse. I love you so madly there is nothing under heaven I would not have done to win you! But I will never trouble you again. Try and forgive what I said of Zorokoff. There was nothing in it. It was the fling of a jealous man. Jealousy makes men mad. I was mad just now. But it is past. And now what can I do to help you? Is there no friend that you can go to?"

Narka's passionate anger was disarmed, but with it her strength of self-command gave way. She struggled to hold it for a moment, and then burst into tears. Schenk forced her gently into a seat, and stood over her, waiting.

"I am very sorry this has happened," she said, after a while, lifting her head and swallowing a sob; "I am very sorry. No, there is nothing you can do for me. Good-by."

"I can't bear the idea of your being here alone," he said. "Is there no one within reach?—Madame de Beaucrillon?"

Narka made a negative movement with her head. "I don't run the risks up here that you imagine. The people won't hurt me. I am Sœur Marguerite's friend. I was going down to the House to see her."

She stood up. Schenk saw there was no use in urging her.

"I will see you that far," he said; "as yet the road there is clear."

He opened the door, and they went out together. Narka noticed the beggar standing at the door of the house opposite. It struck her as odd that she should be quietly stationed there waiting for pennies at such a crisis, for nobody was abroad except those who were going to fight. The street had already undergone a change: every shop that had a shutter had put it up, and everybody had gone in-doors.

Narka saw and felt the change without being conscious of it. Those cruel words of Schenk's, "*he might marry you from a sense of honor, but he does not love you,*" were like the bite of a snake in her flesh.

They walked on rapidly to the House, and did not speak until Schenk said good-by to her at the gate.

The court was a scene of extraordinary excitement; people were coming and going; the children of the schools were flocking in; they had been sent home, but the parents had come back with them, entreating the Sisters to keep them over the night.

"But where are we to put them?" exclaimed Sœur Jeanne, in dismay; "every bed, every mattress in the house is more than filled."

"Pack them up to the infirmary," suggested Marguerite.

"The infirmary!" retorted Sœur Jeanne. "There are ninety children packed into it already; they have hardly room to turn round."

"What does that matter, *ma sœur?*" urged Marguerite; "where there is no room for ninety, there is room enough for a hundred. Get along with you all to the infirmary!" And the children, in high glee at the lawless opportunity, went tumbling up the stairs.

"Oh, Narka, I am so thankful to see you!" cried Marguerite, perceiving her. "Here is a note from Sibyl; it has just come. She wants us both to go off with her to Beaucrillon by the noon express."

"Are you going?" inquired Narka.

"I? What a notion! I thought nobody but Sibyl could have imagined such a thing possible," Marguerite laughed. "Just think how busy we are going to be!" she went on. "The big school-room is turned into an ambulance, and they will be carrying in the wounded as soon as the fighting begins."

While she spoke there was a detonation of fire-arms, first a single shot, then a volley, followed by a prolonged shout that rose in the distance, and came gradually nearer as street after street took it up. The women who were in the court hurried away; the Sisters went

quickly in-doors with the children, who had lingered outside, full of curiosity and delighted excitement. In the twinkling of an eye the place was cleared, and Marguerite and Narka were left alone at the gate.

"You had better run home at once," said Marguerite; "the road is still clear. But don't loiter, and don't stir out while the firing lasts. It is not likely—"

The sentence was cut short by a terrific volley that sounded much nearer this time. Marguerite turned pale, and made the sign of the cross.

"Why may I not stay here with you?" said Narka. "I could help in the ambulance."

"Yes, you might"—Marguerite hesitated—"only I may be sent down to the barricades to attend to the wounded who can't be carried here. Still, if you like—"

As she spoke there came rushing past the gate a band of roughs, shouldering muskets and shouting a ribald song.

"And these are the people you are going to risk your life for?" said Narka—"men who probably don't even know the name of God!"

"Perhaps not; but God knows their name, and has died for every one of them. That is why it is worth while," said Marguerite. She spoke calmly, but Narka could see that she was agitated.

"Are you not afraid, dear?" she said, looking tenderly down on the small figure.

"Afraid?" The tone held just a *soupçon* of haughtiness. The question implied something which stirred Marguerite's blood, and reminded her that certain inherited instincts of her race had not been as effectively repudiated as its outward insignia. *Noli irritare leonem* was the motto of her house, and though the lion lay dormant beneath the dove, just as the lady's silken attire

had disappeared under the peasant's gown,* there were moments when the lion woke up, and when the antique French patrician, than whom the womanhood of all the races offers no loftier or lovelier type, asserted her inalienable dignity. "No, I am not afraid," she said, with penitent humility. "What is there to be afraid of?"

"The firing, the bullets: suppose you were to be killed?"

"Killed? No such luck!" Marguerite tossed her head and laughed.

A suspicion darted through Narka's mind. "Marguerite, you are wearied of your life," she said.

"Wearied of my life? I should never be wearied of it if I did not get homesick now and then."

"Ah! Then you do regret the life you have renounced?"

Marguerite looked up in quick surprise, and then began to laugh. "I meant homesick for heaven. If I were shot down at the barricades in the service of charity, it would be like martyrdom, and I should go straight to heaven. Would not that be luck, dear Narka? Only such a grand death is much too good for me to expect." She gave a little sigh. She looked very tired, though she was excited. Something in her manner and voice struck Narka to the heart. Could it be that this longing for martyrdom was prophetic? Narka resolved to stay and share the risks, whatever they might be.

* The coarse gray gown and stiff white *coiffe* of the Sister of Charity were the costume of the peasants in the seventeenth century, when the order was founded by St. Vincent de Paul.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

THE *émeute* lasted six days. Then came peace and the day of reckoning. La Villette was cowering in its kennel like a whipped hound. Numbers who had been taken fighting on the barricades and in the streets were in prison; but greater numbers still had escaped, and amongst them many of the ringleaders, and these were skulking in holes and corners, nursing their wounds, and dodging the police, who were in hot pursuit of them. For there was no time to lose. Whatever was to be done must be done quickly. In France, more than elsewhere, punishment brooks no delay. To be effective, it must be dealt out promptly, while public feeling is at white heat of indignation against the culprits; delay is fatal; for this righteous anger cools very quickly, sympathy veers round to the criminals, the most deserved penalty is then looked on as tyrannical and vindictive, the heaviest offenses are condoned, and the law-breaker becomes a victim, and not infrequently a martyr.

The white cornettes had been the confidantes of the people all through. Every day before dawn wives and mothers were to be seen waiting at the gate of the House, asking for help and shelter for husbands and sons and brothers; "mon homme" had held a barricade for ten hours, and was a dead man if the police caught him; and so on with scores of others.

Marguerite's wish had been disappointed. She had been a martyr only in spirit and in self-sacrifice; but in the eyes of the people she had won the palm branch as

fully as if she had shed her blood for them. They had loved her before; they now worshipped her; and Narka, who had been her companion through those terrible days, shared in the prestige that surrounded her. Early on the morning of the seventh day they went out together on their stealthy round of illegal visits of mercy through the district, and it was a fresh wonder to Narka to see how Marguerite rose to the new and strange difficulties of the position. Sometimes she spoke to the culprits in a tone of severe command so amusingly at variance with her little figure and her sweet young face that it raised a smile; but this unconscious air of comedy in no way detracted from the impressiveness of what she said. To those who were expiating their criminal folly in bodily pain, suffering from wounds and from remorse, her compassion was boundless; her voice was full of pity and healing balm, and her smile had a pathos that is seldom seen except on lips that have quivered with pain. As Narka went with her through the reeking slums and tenements, and saw her exorcising the evil spirits, subduing impotent rage to humble penitence, making the haters ashamed of their hate, she bethought her how feeble were her own passionate theories for reforming the world compared to this simple philosophy of love. And yet surely there was a flaw in the philosophy somewhere. It was not natural, it was not possible, that Marguerite de Beaucrillon could really feel for these low, vicious, enraged pariahs the love she professed for them. Was her system, then, a lie, a fair edifice built on a rotten foundation of deceit and flattery? "I will have it out with her!" Narka said, as they emerged from a dank cellar, where Marguerite had been administering the salve of loving words and encouragement to a wretched man who had led a whole

band of well-meaning lads to the slaughter, and come out of it with despair and a mortal wound.

"How could you play the hypocrite to that poor wretch, and make believe you love him?" Narka said. They were crossing to the opposite side of the Cour des Chats.

"It is not hypocrisy; I do love him," Marguerite answered, in some surprise.

"Nonsense! Say you pity him—that I can believe; but that you love that dirty savage—it is impossible!"

"There are many kinds of love," said Marguerite. "There is a love of the head, and a love of the senses, and a love of the will—that is the best, the true one; it is the only love that is commanded us: 'He who does the will of my Father....' The Italian girl is a true theologian when she says of her lover, *Mi vuole tanto bene.*"

"I don't know about the theology of it, but I am sure if these people knew that your love for them is part of the Ten Commandments it would not be so efficacious; what flatters them is the belief that you have a personal love for them, whereas you simply pity them, and forgive them."

"And what is love but an eternal forgiving!" Marguerite murmured, saying it rather to herself than to Narka. They were at the door of Antoine Drex's house, so the argument dropped.

Antoine was hiding. He had been recklessly prominent all through the riots, and the police were actively searching for him. The Sisters had brought him food secretly, and Marguerite came to dress his wounds. He had left his own lodging and taken refuge with his old mother in this miserable tenement, recently inhabited by a man who had fallen on a barricade, and whose idiot

child was now moaning on its bed with fever, while la mère Drex tried to soothe it.

Narka assisted Marguerite in dressing Antoine's wound; it was a bad one in the head, but not dangerous; then she went to see if the child wanted any help. "Santez! santez!" wailed the little creature, staring at her with mindless eyes, now glittering with the light of fever.

"What is she calling for?" Narka asked.

"She wants me to sing to her," said the old woman: "poor Binard used to sing the child to sleep of a night; a good thing it was for him too; it kept him from the cabaret ever since his wife's death. I can't, *ma petiote* —I can't," she repeated, as the child kept on her monotonous cry: "Santez! santez!" "When I was young I could turn a tune as well as the rest of them," continued Madame Drex, with a certain complacency in the recollection of her lost powers, "but my old voice now is as cracked as an empty nutshell. You could not sing a *cantique* to quiet her, ma petite dame ?"

The question sent a sharp pang through Narka. In the excitement and busy exertions of the last week she had forgotten all about her lost voice, but this piteous supplication of the sick child reminded her of it, and smote her with a new regret. With the intense desire there came to her a sudden vivifying inward force, swift and potent as the touch of an electric spring. She cleared her throat and began to warble, first in a soft undertone, as if trying an instrument that she was not sure of, whose strings might snap; but she soon grew reassured, and her voice rose, and gained in volume, and rang out in clear, sweet tones.

Marguerite could hardly believe her ears. It seemed like a miracle—one of those miracles of charity that

she herself performed day after day in the desolate places. She crushed the sugar noiselessly in the tisane she was preparing for Antoine Drex, and kept murmuring to herself, with a smile: "God is love! God is love!"

Antoine's eyes were fixed on Narka as if she were some visitant from another world. She looked like one, as she sat singing by the poverty-stricken bed, the flush of a pure emotion on her face, a light of joy in her luminous dark eyes.

When the song—a Russian ballad—was ended, the child called out, "Enco'! enco'!" And Narka, stirred by that *encore* as she had never been by the applause of a salon, sang again; this time, in French, Mignon's lament, "Rendez-moi la patrie, ou laissez-moi mourir!" The child grew calmer, and ceased to toss on her pillow; by the time the song was ended she had fallen asleep. La mère Drex lifted up her hands in a gesture of wonderment and admiration. Narka rose and moved softly out of the room after Marguerite. When they were out on the landing, by a common impulse the two friends turned and kissed one another. Their hearts were too full for speech.

On reaching the bottom of the stairs they found that a crowd had assembled before the house. Marguerite at once guessed that the police had tracked Antoine, and stepped bravely forward to meet the enemy.

"What is the matter?" she said.

"Ma sœur," answered a *blouse*, "we wanted to see whether it was you or the Virgin Mary that was singing up there."

"It was neither one nor the other, you silly people!" said Marguerite, intensely relieved; "it was my friend" —pointing to Narka. "Hush!" she cried, seeing they

were going to cheer. "There is a sick child up there that has just fallen asleep. Don't wake her!"

Obedient to Sœur Marguerite as usual, they walked on silently, making an escort to her and Narka across the court, and accompanying them to the end of the lane beyond it. Then, as by a common accord, they raised a ringing cheer: "Vive le rossignol! Vive l'amie de la Sœur Marguerite!"

The ovation brought the wild roses into Narka's cheeks, and made her heart swell with a sense of victory unlike anything she had ever felt before.

It had been an exciting morning, and she was very tired as she walked home. On reaching her own door it occurred to her that this was the tenth, the day of the meeting. At this very hour it was in full swing, and Ivan Gorff was wondering why she had neither written nor met him at the trysting-place.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

Just as Narka had shut herself in and sat down to realize the happy fact of her voice's return, the main street of the Place was thrown into excitement by an accident. A cab containing two men was coming quietly up the street, when the horse took fright and rushed blindly on, struck against a cart and fell, overturning the cab. One of the travellers, who was in the act of jumping out, paid for this want of presence of mind by an ugly cut in the head; the other in attempting to follow him had hurt his leg, and lay groaning in the bottom of the overturned cab. Two *gamins* jumped up on the wheel to look in at him.

"It is the Commissary of Police!" cried one of them, turning to the by-standers. His face was a picture; it expressed a keen sense of the humorous side of the situation, with a dread of "catching it" if he were overheard by the still powerful though prostrate functionary. For it was, in truth, no less a person than the mighty Commissary who lay trapped in the upset vehicle, groaning with a sprained ankle like a common man. A crowd had gathered in a moment. No one recognized the man on the pavement, but all shrewdly suspected him to be a police agent come to participate in some important arrest. Anyhow, the pair were after no good. It was clearly a judgment of Providence that had overtaken them, in favor of the poor wretch they were after, and the fun of the thing was delicious. People came from the neighboring shops and volunteered help. The cab was soon set on its wheels.

"I have hurt my foot badly," said the Commissary. "Is there a doctor anywhere near?"

"We are close to the Sisters' House, monsieur," said a workman; "you had better let us take you there while the doctor is fetched." Another cab was called, and the two injured men were helped into it and driven off.

Sœur Marguerite was in the dispensary, and saw the cab stop at the gate with its procession of ragamuffins. Presently the two Commissaries were assisted across the court into the House.

In a moment several Sisters were in attendance. The injuries proved more painful than serious, and the Sisters were quite capable of dealing with them without the doctor. As soon as the Commissary's sprain had been attended to, and he was made comfortable on an improvised sofa, with pillows at his back, he asked for writing materials, and wrote a short note. Then beckoning to Marguerite, "Ma sœur," he said, in a confidential tone, "I want you to do a little commission for me. I want you to take a cab and drive to the Préfecture, and ask to see M. le Préfet—you will send in my card—and then give this note into his hands."

"Ah!" Marguerite's look of intense curiosity was irresistible.

"I will tell you what it is about," whispered the Commissary. "I and my colleague came here to arrest a scoundrel named Drex—Antoine Drex; but we have been hindered as you see. Now it is most necessary they should know this at once at the Préfecture, and send on two others to do it, or the fellow may get wind of the matter and slip through our fingers. You understand?"

"Oh yes, monsieur, I understand." Marguerite's heart was thumping so that she wondered the Commis-

sary did not hear it and suspect. "I don't think they would let me see M. le Préfet," she said, turning the letter in her hand; "had I not better say you want some one to be sent up here to you?"

"No, no; that would lose too much time," he said, impatiently. "They will let you in at once when you show my card with that word written on it."

"Is he suspected of anything very bad, this Antoine Drex?" she inquired, with an idea that every minute's delay might help Antoine.

"He is not suspected—he is known to be a dangerous villain. Go, ma sœur; not a word to any one here, but go!"

Marguerite slipped the letter up her sleeve and went out. Once in the street, she stood debating. It was a hard task that was set her. Must she execute it? Poor Antoine! She knew he was more sinned against than sinning. But a voice whispered, "*You are bound to obey the law.*" She heard it; still she hesitated. Suddenly another voice whispered: "Charity is the greatest commandment of all. Charity is the law of God." She agreed with this voice; still she hesitated; but after a moment's delay she glanced quickly, furtively, up and down the street, and then started off in the direction of the Cour des Chats, walking as fast as she dared, and quickening her pace to a run when she turned into the dirty laneway that led into it. Antoine was sitting as she had left him, only smoking a pipe. His mother had gone out to the *lavoir;* the idiot child, lulled to rest by Narka's song, was still fast asleep.

Marguerite closed the door, and then, dropping her voice, "Antoine," she said, "the police are in pursuit of you. The Commissary was on his way here when he met with an accident; he is now at the House, rest-

ing, and I am going to the Préfecture with this letter from him desiring some one to be sent to arrest you."

Without waiting to see the effect of her information, she turned quickly away, and closed the door after her.

An hour later two police-officers drove up to the entrance of the Cour des Chats, and crossed over to the house where Antoine was lodging. They went up and knocked at the door, guided by the instructions contained in the Commissary's letter. Some one said, "Come in." But on opening the door they found, instead of Antoine Drex, Sœur Marguerite, knitting by the window.

"Pardon, ma sœur," said one of the agents, taking off his hat; "we are looking for Antoine Drex. We have come to arrest him."

Marguerite's heart was beating like a hammer on an anvil, but she looked at him, and said, composedly, "You had better go to the House and tell M. le Commissaire that you found me here in place of Antoine Drex."

The two police-officers looked at her as if they doubted her sanity. Presently they began to understand. They were young, they were brave, they had hearts of men.

"Ma sœur, I have the honor to salute you," said one of them.

They both bowed and walked out of the room, and she heard the sound of smothered laughter on the stairs.

But there remained now the Commissary to face. Marguerite knew there would be no sympathetic laughter there. The Commissary, indeed, flew into a great rage when he heard the trick that had been played him, and sent for the Superior, and whipped Marguerite on

her unoffending back; he threatened to denounce the community as accomplices of all the rebels and rascals of the district, to have the House shut up, etc., etc.

Marguerite meantime had followed the agents to the House, and walked bravely in to receive her reward. She was very frightened, but she did not show it, and this assumption of coolness made matters worse.

"So, ma sœur, this is how you respect the law!" cried the angry Commissary; "before you went to the Préfecture you gave that scoundrel a hint to skedaddle."

"Monsieur le Commissaire, I am incapable of anything so mean," replied Marguerite; "I told him plainly that I was going to the Préfecture with a message from you for his arrest."

"And you are not ashamed of helping a blackguard like that to evade the law?"

"Antoine Drex is not a blackguard, Monsieur le Commissaire. He is an honest man; he has been very unhappy; he was cruelly and unjustly treated, and he is exasperated. He was falsely accused of murdering his drunken wife, and kept ten months in prison with thieves and homicides before he was put on his trial and acquitted. He came out of prison with his health broken and his heart maddened, and he has never got back into his right heart since. The injustice and cruelty of the law turned him into a rebel. And so it would have done you or me, M. le Commissaire."

"I'll tell you what," said the Commissary, "I will report you to the Minister as a rebel more dangerous than a score of Antoine Drexes." He was furious; but as he vented his fury something in her young face, an expression at once timid and dauntless, reproachful and beseeching, went to his heart. He turned away

with an angry grunt, and remained silent, while Marguerite picked up and replaced at his back the pillow that, in his agitation, he had sent rolling to the floor.

A cab was now waiting to take him and his colleague away. Before he left he spoke civilly to Sœur Jeanne, and told her to look after Sœur Marguerite, and see that she played no tricks with the law in future, for she might fall next time on some one who would be less ready to overlook her misdemeanors than he was.

Sœur Jeanne scolded Marguerite; but the community had a merry time of it at recreation that evening, nor were they to be checked in their fun over the Commissary's misadventure and the sorry figure he made in his official discomfiture by Sœur Jeanne's attempt to frown and look aggrieved.

Narka had heard nothing of the event, not having left home since she had parted from Marguerite. At ten o'clock that night she was a little startled by some one knocking at her door. She supposed it was the concierge with a letter; but before opening she asked who was there.

A voice that she did not recognize answered, "A friend of Sœur Marguerite."

Narka drew back the bolt. She did not know what fear was, but she was conscious of an unpleasant sensation when she beheld a huge man, with his head and shoulders concealed by a shawl, step quickly in and close the door behind him. He threw back the shawl, and Narka recognized Antoine Drex. He told her what had happened, and how he had been hiding in a wood-yard all the afternoon and evening, and now implored her to shelter him till morning and give him some food. She fetched him bread and wine and some cold meat, and he rolled an arm-chair into the little kitchen, which was the

only addition to the salon bedroom in her apartment. But Antoine declared he was lodged like a préfet.

Narka was glad to harbor a hunted fellow-creature, to give sanctuary to a victim of that long-armed and cruel tyrant, the law. Very likely Antoine was deep-dyed in plots against the government; but Narka was not the one to think worse of any man for that. Every political criminal was dear to her for Basil's sake. Nevertheless, though she was glad to open her door to Drex, she felt that in doing so she was incurring a great personal risk, and if Antoine rested easily, she did not. All night long she lay awake, listening to every sound; a dog that barked, a cart that rumbled, made her start. She was up before Antoine gave signs of stirring. Then she prepared some food for him, and, with his shawl drawn round him, he stole out in the early morn, and went down to the House just as the gate was opened.

Marguerite was horrified when she heard where he had passed the night. But Antoine assured her that no harm would come to Narka; no one had seen him coming or going. The street had been quite deserted both at night and in the morning.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

Narka never gave a thought to the possible consequences to herself, from the moment she saw Antoine Drex safe out of her house; but the event had excited her extraordinarily. She forgot that his coming to her for shelter was the natural enough result of her visit to him with Marguerite in the morning, and she magnified the incident into a portent. She must be destined to play some part in this great revolutionary drama that was being enacted all over Europe, or else why did these chances pursue her? Some event was at hand, she said to herself, some great event in which a rôle was surely reserved to her by fate or by Providence.

"Do you believe in presentiments?" she said to Marguerite, when they met that afternoon.

"Certainly!" was the emphatic rejoinder; "I believe them to be a sign of indigestion." Marguerite knew that Narka was morbidly fanciful at all times, and she made a point of snubbing her fancies. Just now she seemed *exaltée* and overwrought.

Nothing occurred during the day to justify Narka's presentiments, but at about ten o'clock that night she was again startled by a visitor. This time it was a ring, a very light ring, but to her imagination, on the watch for signs and portents, it sounded preternaturally loud in the stillness. Could it be Antoine come back? Marguerite had said they would shelter him at the House until he could get away to Calvados, his native place. Narka went to the door and asked who was there.

A voice answered in Russian, "It is I, Narka."

Her heart gave a great leap, a low cry rose to her lips, the bolt flew back—she never knew how—and then she was in Basil Zorokoff's arms. For one long moment life seemed over; she was conscious of nothing but the wild rapture of possessing him; his strong arms were clasping her, his cheek was pressed against hers. Was it some sweet madness, or was she in heaven?

"Are we alone?" he whispered, raising his head and glancing round the dimly lighted room, while he relaxed his hold of her.

"Yes, quite alone. Oh, Basil, is it you, or am I dreaming?"

She trembled and clung to him as if she was afraid he would escape if she let him go. He drew her to the little couch, and they sat down together.

"I frightened you," he said, laughing. "I ought to have given you warning, and not come down on you like a thunder-bolt; but there was no time, unless I telegraphed on the road, and that would have been a risk."

"I am not a bit frightened, only beside myself with joy. Oh, Basil! Basil! my love! my love!" She looked up into his face, sobbing for happiness.

He bent down and kissed her tenderly. She could see that he was aged; but he was grander and handsomer than ever.

"Where have you come from?" she said; "have you escaped, or did the Prince consent to your coming away?"

"Consent?" Basil threw back his head with the gesture she remembered so well. "I escaped in disguise by the same train that took him to Berlin in attendance on the Emperor, who is gone to visit his brother Kaiser."

"Then he does not know that you have escaped?"

"He knows it by this time, and he is on his knees, tearing his hair, and swearing by St. Nicholas that Basil Zorokoff is the greatest wretch under heaven. Oh! it is a fine thing to be a loyal subject, and hate one's own flesh and blood for love of the Emperor."

"When did you get here?" asked Narka.

"An hour ago. I have come on here from the train."

"Then you have not seen Sibyl? You did not know she is in town?"

"I did know it; but I came straight to you."

"My own, my own—" She locked her arms round his throat, and let her head drop on his breast. "You came first to me!"

"Of course I came first to you. Let me look at you." He put his hand under her chin, and held up her face so that the light from the shaded lamp fell upon it. "My poor Narka," he said, gazing at her with great tenderness, and then kissing her, "you are grown thinner, but you are as beautiful as ever. And in spite of all you have gone through—the prison—" He felt her shudder in his arms, and she nestled closer to him.

"Don't let us talk of that," she said, in a low voice; "it is all past, and we are together. I want to hear about you. Tell me everything; tell me all that has happened since we parted. Remember how little I know —only hints from Sibyl in her letters first, and since then stray news of you through Ivan Gorff. Tell me the story yourself now."

And Basil, with his arm round her, and her hands locked about his neck, told it rapidly, passing lightly over all that was too painful and humiliating, so as not to lacerate her loving heart, but enlarging complacently on the work he had done, the results he had achieved, the brilliant hopes he cherished. Narka saw with pride

that he had ripened greatly during the interval of their separation; his mind had gained in shrewdness and insight, his faculties had evidently grown in power of concentration; she was amazed at the vigor and quickness with which he summed up the situation, weighed chances, forecast probabilities, and arrived at practical conclusions. It was clear that he had thrown his whole soul and his whole energies into the service of patriotism. He looked a patriot and a hero every inch, so strong and straight and bold in his manly beauty—a lover for a queen to be proud of. And Narka was proud of him; her heart swelled with pride in him, she admired him more than she had ever done, and she loved him with her whole soul. And yet—she was conscious of a disappointment somewhere. It was noble in him to be absorbed in this grand impersonal object, to have cast away, for the sake of serving his oppressed fellow-countrymen, all the pleasures that his youth and rank might have claimed; she admired and applauded the nobleness that this choice evinced, and yet there was a vague disappointment somewhere. Schenk's cruel words recurred to her with a sting that even the joy of Basil's presence could not allay. "He does not love you; he only loves his ambition. If he marries you, it will be from a sense of honor." Yet Basil was her affianced lover, and she was beautiful, and he had come to her before he went to the sister whom he loved so dearly. How could she doubt but that he loved her best? If only he had lingered a little longer on the joy of their meeting, and then entered eagerly on the question of their approaching marriage!

There was a moment's pause while these reflections sped rapidly through Narka's mind, and then that subtle electric consciousness which flashes thought from

one soul to another with whom it is in close sympathy touched Basil.

"And Sibyl ?" he said; "she has been true to you ?"

"In what sense true ? Does she know of our engagement ?"

"I took for granted she did."

"She never let me suspect it if she did. And, dear Basil, I am afraid she will resent our marriage as bitterly as the Prince."

"I hope not, when she knows the whole truth—when I tell her how dear you are to me, and how much I owe you. I hope to win her consent without great difficulty. She will be so glad to see me, it will be easier to persuade her."

Narka's heart sank a little. Was Sibyl's consent, then, essential ?

"You see," Basil went on, "we are still in my father's power. I am absolutely penniless if he does not relent, and I could not ask you to marry a beggar. I have brought trouble enough already on you, God knows, without that."

"Oh, but I am going to make our fortune," Narka said, with a sudden thrill of exultation. And she told him of Zampa's offer, and the splendid career that was ready waiting for her.

"And I am to live in idleness while you work ?" Basil said, with a laugh; and he caressed her.

"You will be working for the great cause, while I work for bread. Don't you love me well enough to eat my bread ?" She drew herself up, and keeping one hand round his neck, she laid the other upon his breast. "Say, Basil, do you love me well enough to eat my bread ?"

He took her hand and kissed it, and held it clasped.

"The husband ought to work for the wife," he said, "not the wife for the husband."

"That is the philosophy of pride and of your aristocratic traditions. A patriot should be above such prejudice. Marguerite was glad when she heard this chance of helping you was in store for me."

"Marguerite! Ah! how is she?" There was a tender cadence in his voice as he said the name; it struck cold on Narka's heart.

"She is very well. I see her every day."

"Does she seem happy?"

"She is perfectly happy. She loves her vocation."

"Ah! That vocation is a wonderful thing. But she was an angel always—Marguerite."

Nobody knew this better than Narka, yet to hear Basil say it, and pronounce Marguerite's name in that soft undertone, burned her like the sting of a wasp.

"Good heavens! is that midnight?" he exclaimed, as the little clock on the mantel struck the hour. "How the time has sped! I have kept you up so late, dearest. I have not slept myself for four nights."

He made a movement to rise, but Narka clung and nestled to him.

"Must you go?" she said, rubbing her cheek against his coat caressingly. "Tell me about Sibyl: will she be very angry with you for coming to me first?"

"I don't mean to tell her. I sha'n't say I have seen you."

"Ah! Yet it would be as good a way as any of breaking the truth to her?"

"I could not begin by vexing her and making her jealous. She has been the best of sisters to me always. No one has ever loved me better than Sibyl, except you, my Narka."

The words were sweet, and tenderly spoken; but he might have pressed her to his heart, Narka thought, for his arm was round her. The next moment she mocked at herself for this ingenuity of self-torture. He had flown to her first; he had proved by this that she was his chief, his first object. Why could not she rest on that and be content, and silence these promptings of sick jealousy? It was natural as well as generous and unselfish in him to consider Sibyl, and Narka admired the large-hearted love that embraced every claim so faithfully.

"When shall I see you again, darling?" she said, as he gently unwound her arms and stood up.

"I will come as early as I can to-morrow," he replied, "unless Sibyl sends for you to come and meet me at her house."

"Oh no, not that!" said Narka, shrinking. "I could not go through the comedy of a first meeting before Sibyl!"

"That is true. Then I will come here and fetch you, and we will go back to her together."

She went out with him to the dark entry. At the outer door he turned once more and folded her in a close embrace. As he released her he whispered, "When you see Marguerite you may tell her I am here. She will be glad to know that I am safe."

"Yes, I will tell her," Narka replied. It was kind and natural that he should think of sending a message to Marguerite.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

Narka was up before the earliest bell. When she looked round her it seemed wonderful that nothing was changed in the shabby room; that last night's vision had not left some visible trail of light or beauty behind it.

"My love! my love! did I dream that you were here, that you held me in your arms and kissed me? My own! my own!"

She struck her hands together, and laughed out loud for joy. The little morning duties were quickly performed, the frugal meal made ready and partaken of; then she dressed herself with care, inspired by the coquetry of love, and made the room as pretty as she could, arranging the flowers she had bought of a poor woman at the door, placing the books to the best advantage on the table, moving and changing everything, as if the magic of love's touch must improve the homely furniture. Then she sat down to the piano, and began to warble and trill with the full-throated rapture of a thrush in spring. She fancied Basil listening to her; she fancied herself bringing down La Scala in thunders of applause, and gathering up gold in bushels and pouring it out at his feet; she saw herself ministering to his wants, making his home bright and beautiful, and setting him free to work with a liberated mind in the great cause he had espoused. Suddenly, in the midst of her dreams, she remembered that her music might drown the sound of his ring, and she came away from the

piano and moved about, changing the chairs and the books again, and smiling at everything, and humming for very inability to check the joy that was overflowing in her. At last the bell sounded. She flew to the door. But it was not Basil; it was Madame Blaquette. The landlady put her finger to her lips, glided quickly in, closed the door, and then, dropping her voice to a guilty whisper, "Dear young lady," she said, "can I speak in the strictest privacy?"

"Certainly, Madame Blaquette," replied Narka, in a high, cheerful tone; she was in a mood to enjoy the landlady's harmless little fancies.

"I have come to warn you of a great peril," whispered Madame Blaquette, squeezing Narka's arm: "the police have got notice that you have political papers here, and they are coming up to search your place. Burn or hide whatever you have; but be quick; there is no time to lose!"

Narka could hardly trust her senses. Was this a delusion like the panic about the sewing-machine? Still, she *had* those papers. "Who told you the police were coming here?" she asked, in sudden alarm.

"Dr. Schenk. He met me the other side of the Place, and sent me back to warn you. But make haste, or it will be too late."

Narka's mistrust vanished at the mention of Schenk's name. She looked round her like a trapped creature seeking for some way of escape. There was none; there was no fire where she could burn the papers; there was not a hole or corner in the narrow space where they would be safe from the lynx eyes of the police for ten minutes.

"I will take the papers and run down to the Sisters," she said.

"Dear young lady, the police will meet you. They are coming up the street."

"Then I am lost!" cried Narka, clasping her forehead with both hands. There was a sound of men's footsteps in the entry. "Come," she said; and seizing Madame Blaquette by the wrist, she drew her over to the alcove, dragged a box from under the bed, unlocked it, and took out the ivory casket which contained the papers and Basil's articles, and thrusting it into the landlady's hands, "There! hide it under your shawl, and take it down to Sœur Marguerite for me." There was a ring at the door. "Oh, my God! there they are!" she cried, turning white to the lips.

"There is a back way, if I can get out through the kitchen window," said Madame Blaquette. "Bring a chair."

They hurried to the kitchen. Narka threw open the window, let down a chair, helped the agitated landlady to step on it, and then drew up the chair and shut the window, and went back into the room. The bell rang a second time. Narka, trembling in her strong young limbs like a whipped hound, walked to the door and opened it.

"Oh, Marguerite, it is you! Come in quick," she cried, breathlessly. And she told her in a few hurried words what had just happened.

"And she is gone down with the box to me?" said Marguerite; "then I must hurry home and be there to meet her."

Narka would have been thankful to have the support of her presence when the police came; but it was all-important to get the casket into safe-keeping, so she did not detain her. Marguerite was not surprised on reaching the House to find that Madame Blaquette had

not yet arrived: the back way made a great round, and the old lady might linger to make sure of avoiding the police. The dispensary window commanded the court; Marguerite went in there, so as to see her the moment she arrived. But ten minutes passed, then twenty, and Madame Blaquette did not appear. Could she have been seen escaping from the window and followed and arrested? This was highly improbable; still, when half an hour passed, Marguerite grew nervous. There was no one to consult. All the Sisters were absent on their rounds, or engaged in the schools. Suddenly the sound of a light hammer fell on her ear. She opened a door off the dispensary; it was a closet into which they had smuggled Antoine Drex. He was cobbling an old boot, nailing a sole to it. Antoine was safe as a tombstone, and cunning as a rat; he knew the police, and he knew every turn of the lanes and courts through which Madame Blaquette had to pass. Marguerite told him what had happened.

"Most likely she's hiding till she makes sure those *vermine* are out of the way," said Antoine. "Keep your eye on the gate, ma sœur; old Blaque will turn up." He nodded, and went on with his job; but he knit his brow with a scowl.

"Take care you don't stay too long at that, Antoine," said Marguerite; "the blood might go to your head and bring on congestion."

"Oh! I'm all right, ma sœur," he replied, nodding confidentially.

Marguerite felt a little reassured. She went back into the dispensary and kept her watch on the gate; but when an hour went by, and there was no sign of Madame Blaquette, she could bear it no longer. The suspense was intolerable. She resolved to go back to Nar-

ka and see what had happened there, at any rate. She opened the door of the closet to tell Antoine she was going, but to her surprise the place was empty. Where and how had he gone off? She remembered there was a way out by the garden, but he must have got out of the window; and why on earth had he done this? He was to have made his escape that evening, travelling in a wine wagon till he got to Caen, when he was to be rolled off the truck, and to make his way on foot to St. Aubin, his native village. It seemed to Marguerite that everybody was on the wrong tack to-day. She walked quickly on to Narka's. The Place was quiet, just as she had left it an hour ago; no groups about, no sign of any unusual incident, such as an arrest, having stirred the neighborhood. This was reassuring; still her hand shook as she pulled the bell, and she uttered an exclamation of relief when Narka appeared.

"Well?"

"There has been nobody. I begin to think Madame Blaquette imagined the whole thing."

"But the box? What has she done with it?"

"The box? Hasn't she taken it to you?"

"No; she has never been near me."

Narka turned deadly pale. A horrible suspicion flashed through both their minds. "Oh, my God! it was a trap," said Narka; "it was a trap set for Basil. They saw him here last night."

Marguerite thought she had gone stark mad. The scared expression of her face reminded Narka that she had not told her about Basil's arrival.

"Oh, darling!" she said, "we have not had a moment to breathe, or I should have told you Basil has escaped; he is here in Paris. He came to see me last night; he had just only arrived by the train, and I was expecting

him again this morning when that dreadful woman came."

"Basil is here!" Marguerite repeated, in amazement.

"Yes; he came late, about ten o'clock, and staid till midnight; I watched him across the Place; there was not a soul about; but those blood-hounds must have tracked him! Oh, my God! has he fallen into their fangs again?" She wrung her hands in misery.

They stood silent, both their hearts beating with terror.

"Do you know at all what those papers contained?" Marguerite asked, under her breath.

"I fancy they were a political programme, or something of that sort, drawn up by a man who is dead since, Ivan Gorff told me. But then there were those articles in Basil's own handwriting. Oh!"

Marguerite did not know what articles she was talking about; Narka had never told her of those translations, or of the meeting.

"Narka," she said, laying her hand on the girl's arm, "do you think there was a confession in them? About Father Christopher?"

"I don't think so; but I don't know. Oh, Marguerite, what is to be done?"

"Where is Basil staying?" asked Marguerite.

"I don't know; I never thought of asking him. But Sibyl will know; he is most likely with her now, if— Oh, my God! I feel half mad! Only think: he has barely escaped, and to be caught again!" She put her hand to her forehead, and dropped into a seat.

"We don't know yet whether he is caught," said Marguerite, "or even likely to be caught; don't let us jump at the worst conclusion in a minute. The whole thing may be a silly scare of that old goose Blaquette's invention."

"But she said Schenk sent her to warn me. How could she have known I had papers unless he or some one told her?"

There was no denying this.

"Well, you can't sit here waiting to be arrested," said Marguerite. "Put on your bonnet, and go round by the back way, and take refuge with Madame Drex. And this evening you can steal down to us."

Narka heaved a great sigh, but she did not move.

"Dear Narka, for Basil's sake don't lose heart," Marguerite entreated. "Get up and go, and I will hurry off to Sibyl."

"Oh, Sibyl! Sibyl!" Narka cried, in an accent of poignant pain.

"Go!" Marguerite persisted, trying to make her rise. Narka seemed incapable either of resisting or deciding. She rose passively, and let Marguerite help on her bonnet and cloak.

"Let me see you safe out by the window before I go," said Marguerite.

But Narka, roused at last to some realization of her position and of the necessity of the moment, said that she must put away some few things and lock her drawers. This was reasonable enough, and Marguerite, seeing that she had recovered her presence of mind, was satisfied to leave her behind and hurry off on her own mission. They stood at the door together. Narka took her in her arms and kissed her, a long, loving kiss.

"God bless you, Marguerite! You are God's providence to me always."

She opened the door to let her out. As she did so, two men stood outside. One was the Commissary of Police. He laid his hand on Narka's shoulder and said, "I arrest you in the name of the Emperor!"

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

SIBYL had returned to Paris the moment the riots were over; but she had not ventured near the disturbed quarters, nor had she seen Marguerite, consequently when the latter walked into her boudoir, half an hour after Narka's arrest, Sibyl welcomed her with double delight.

"You haven't met him!" she exclaimed, running to embrace her.

"Whom?" said Marguerite.

"Basil!—yes, *Basil!* He has only just left me. He is gone off to see you and Narka. He walked in here this morning, and nearly killed me with the joy of the surprise. You look as if you thought I had gone crazy; but it is perfectly true."

"I am only too glad to believe it," replied Marguerite, with disappointing calmness. "I am glad of good news from any direction."

"Why, what do you mean? What has happened?" Sibyl asked, in alarm.

"Narka is in great trouble. She has been arrested."

"Arrested? Again? Here? Good heavens!" Sibyl sat down.

"Yes," said Marguerite, sitting too; "it happened half an hour ago. I was there when the police came."

"And what have they arrested her for?"

Marguerite was embarrassed. If Basil had not spoken of his engagement, it might be indiscreet to mention the papers that had been seized. "I heard nothing except that they had a warrant to arrest her," she said. But

the perplexity in her mind got into her face, and Sibyl saw it.

"You know more than that, Marguerite," she said. "Has Narka been associating with those wicked rioters up at La Villette?"

"A man who was wounded and pursued by the police sought refuge with her one night, and that may have been discovered. But what is to be done? How are we to help her? You must know hosts of people who have influence. There is Prince Krinsky; you must go to him."

"But he is the Russian Ambassador!"

"Well, and is not that a reason? What are ambassadors for but to help their countrymen when they get into trouble?"

"That depends upon what the trouble is. It is not likely our Ambassador would feel it his duty to help any Russian for conspiring against our Emperor."

"Why should you at once conclude that she has been conspiring against your Emperor? My belief is, the whole affair is either a gross mistake or some cruel trick, and if you won't help her, I will ask Gaston to do it."

"As if I did not care a great deal more than Gaston about Narka!" retorted Sibyl. "The fact is, I suspect I know more about this arrest than you do. We were warned months ago that Narka was associating with disreputable people who would get her into trouble. That Dr. Schenk that she had attending her bears a very compromising character. How came she to know him?"

"Through Ivan Gorff. Ivan brought him to her when she fell ill. That was not her fault."

"It was her misfortune, anyhow. It obliged me to be very circumspect in my intercourse with her. It would not have done for me to become identified with

a person who associated with bad characters. My house is a centre of Russian society in Paris, and though I am now a French woman, it might have injured my father and Basil if I had paraded my friendship with a Russian who was on intimate terms with conspirators."

And so this was the *mot de l'énigme*, the secret of the cold aloofness which had wounded Narka so deeply.

"I don't believe Narka has been associating with conspirators," said Marguerite. "You need not have been afraid of her compromising you." Then, after a moment's pause, "What would they do to her if she were accused of anything of that sort?" she asked.

"If she has mixed herself up in any treason against the Emperor of France, the French law would deal with her."

"But if it was against the Emperor of Russia?"

"In that case they would send her to Russia to be tried."

"Oh!"

If Sibyl's answer had been, "They will flog her to death," the interjection could not have expressed more horror. Marguerite's look and tone seemed to hold a terrible revelation.

"Did Narka ever tell you about what happened to her in the prison?" Sibyl asked, in an altered manner.

"She let me guess. Oh, Sibyl!" said Marguerite, clasping her hands, and her eyes filled with tears, "how awful if she were to go through that again!"

Sibyl changed color, and stood up, and moved restlessly about the room. Then, as if conquered by some motive which bore down all opposition, "I will go to Prince Krinsky," she said.

Marguerite burst into tears, and kissed her, and hurried away.

Sibyl ordered the carriage and went to dress. Just as she was ready to go down-stairs, Basil came back with M. de Beaucrillon. They were both in high spirits.

"You have not heard?" said Sibyl. "Narka is arrested."

Basil uttered a violent expletive in Russian, and turned pale.

"Arrested! What for?" said M. de Beaucrillon, scarcely less moved.

"Marguerite, who told me about it—she has only just gone—says she knows nothing but the fact of the arrest. She was with Narka when the police came and carried her away."

"I must go to her at once," said Basil, picking up his hat, that he had dropped in his excitement, and he was leaving the room. "I must go to the prison and pay my way in to her. Where is the prison?"

"My dear Basil, you are the last person who ought to go near her," protested Sibyl—"you who are so compromised yourself."

"Sibyl is right," said M. de Beaucrillon. "You would only compromise her still more. But what in Heaven's name has Narka been doing to get into this new trouble?"

Basil took a turn in the room, and then suddenly coming up to Sibyl, he said, "The time has come for me to speak out. I am engaged to Narka."

"*What?*" Sibyl cried, almost with a shriek.

"*Diable!*" exclaimed M. de Beaucrillon.

Then followed a pause of stupefied amazement from both.

"Yes," said Basil, "the night I left Yrakow I asked her to be my wife. I cannot see why the news should strike you both dumb with horror, as if it were a crime.

Narka is good and gifted and beautiful, and you, Sibyl, have looked on her as a sister all your life."

But Sibyl could not answer him; the power of speech seemed to have left her. She was clutching the mantel, her face was blanched, the color had faded from her eyes, and they stared fixedly at Basil with an expression that was indefinable.

"*Mon cher ami*," said M. de Beaucrillon, "I must own I don't understand your wonder at the effect of your announcement on my wife. It is not such a surprise to me. I always thought Narka's position in the family was an anomalous one, and likely to end in some catas—culmination of this sort. I said so to Sibyl long ago, but she ridiculed the idea and laughed at me."

"I don't see why the culmination should have excited Sibyl's ridicule," Basil retorted, looking angrily at her.

"One has not far to look for the reason, nevertheless," said Gaston. "Mademoiselle Narka is undoubtedly all that you say, as gifted as she is good; but she is the daughter of a Jewish trader, whereas you are—"

"Her affianced husband," interrupted Basil.

"Ah! just so. Then there is nothing more to be said, and it only remains for me to congratulate you." And M. de Beaucrillon bowed stiffly.

"Oh, Basil! Basil!" Sibyl cried, and she clasped her hands and burst into tears, and flung herself sobbing on a couch.

"So much for a woman's friendship!" said Basil, bitterly; and he looked at his brother-in-law as if expecting him to acquiesce in the contemptuous sentiment. But M. de Beaucrillon walked over and leaned against the chimney-piece, looking down at his sobbing wife with an air of unconcealed annoyance.

"Look here, Sibyl," said Basil, after a momentary

hesitation, "and you too, de Beaucrillon, listen to what I have to say, and give me a fair hearing. When I came back that evening with Father Christopher's pardon there was a warrant signed for my arrest. The Stanovoï gave me notice, and offered to let me escape before the warrant reached him if I paid him fifty thousand roubles. I could not by any possibility lay my hands on the sum within the time. I had three hours to find it. I knew you had not half the amount with you, and there was no one else to call upon. I was prepared to be arrested by ten o'clock that night. I told Narka about the warrant, and by mere chance I mentioned the offer made me by the Stanovoï. She gave me the money, and I escaped."

"Narka!" they both exclaimed, aghast.

"Narka gave you *fifty thousand roubles!*" repeated M. de Beaucrillon, in a tone of dense incredulity.

"Narka," replied Basil. "It so happened that that very day she learned that a legacy of precisely fifty thousand roubles had been paid into the hands of Perrow for her by the executor of an uncle of Tante Nathalie. Narka rode in to X., got the money, and returned just in time. The Stanovoï, who had had me closely watched, was lying in ambush at the gate, and I paid him the money. Before making my escape I asked Narka to be my wife."

"*Ma foi!* I don't see how you could have helped it!" exclaimed M. de Beaucrillon, with generous warmth; "no man of honor could have done less."

"I don't see that at all," said Sibyl, whose sobs and tears had been suddenly checked by the counter-current of emotion. "I can't see that honor made it necessary for him to dishonor his name. It was most kind and generous of Narka; but any friend worthy of the name

would have done as much. And as far as that went, I would have paid the debt, had I known of it, within a month. I will do so now, and twofold, tenfold, gratefully and willingly."

"There are debts that cannot be paid," said Basil, angry and hurt; "but the money is the least part of what I owe Narka." He pulled at his mustache, and after a moment's wavering and debating, "I had in my possession at the time," he continued, "documents that were then of great importance, and of the most compromising character; I could not destroy them, and I dared not take them with me. I asked Narka to keep them. I knew and she knew that they would bring grievous trouble on any one with whom they were found; but she accepted the trust without hesitating. The Stanovoï, who knew she had been with me to the last, and who no doubt discovered that she had given me the ransom, denounced her as having my papers. She was arrested, and kept six months in prison. God and herself alone know what she suffered there; but they got nothing out of her. She left Kronstadt without having betrayed me by a word." He seemed almost overcome for a moment. "You know the rest," he went on, hurriedly. "Tante Nathalie could not rally from the shock. Narka came away amongst strangers, first in one place, then in another; she suffered every sort of hardship, and it has been all my doing. And because I don't throw her over like a heartless scoundrel, you cry out that I am dishonoring myself!"

"Narka is a noble creature," said M. de Beaucrillon, with genuine feeling. "No man worthy of the name could behave otherwise than you are doing."

Sibyl, who had entirely ceased crying, got up and went over to Basil and kissed him. "Yes, Narka has

behaved nobly," she said, "and you are the most chivalrous of men. For the sake of all she has done and suffered, we will receive her as your wife."

The concession was probably as much as Basil could have expected from Sibyl under any circumstances; but he took it coldly, and without a word of thanks or comment.

"The question now is," said M. de Beaucrillon, "what is to be done to get her out of this fresh trouble. You have no idea what has led to it?"

"I may still be the cause of it," Basil replied, remembering last night's visit, and the possibility of its having been discovered. "She may have kept those papers; it is very possible."

"Then we must go to Prince Krinsky at once," said Sibyl.

"What has Krinsky to do with it?" asked Basil, sharply.

"If she has been watched by our police—and nobody else had any motive in watching her—Prince Krinsky will know, and he is the only person who can help."

Basil thought it very unlikely that the Prince would help; the name of Krinsky had been as the seven devils let loose on him all these months in St. Petersburg, and the name of Zorokoff was no doubt in equally bad odor with the Krinskys. The ambassador was not likely to extend his favor to any offender who was identified with the family of the man who had rejected Princess Marie.

"Sibyl is right," said M. de Beaucrillon. "Krinsky is the person we must apply to, and no time must be lost."

"I wish I could see Ivan before we move in the matter," said Basil, in evident perplexity. He went to the window, and saw that the brougham was waiting in the court; then pulled out his watch. "I think I

could catch him by driving there now. Yes, I will try and see Ivan; he will throw some light on the affair that will guide us. Don't go to the Russian embassy till I come back," he said to Sibyl; and snatching up his hat, he hurried away, and in a minute they heard the brougham driving out of the court.

"Well!" said M. de Beaucrillon, flinging himself into a chair, and he threw up his hands in a gesture of utter amazement; "it is the most astounding story that I ever heard!"

Sibyl tore off her bonnet and tossed it from her, and pulled off her gloves in an excited manner; she seemed too agitated to speak. After a pause, "To think," she burst out, "that Narka should have been all this time engaged to him and never told me! The base hypocrisy of it is incredible. And to think of such a scene going on that night at Yrakow and I left in ignorance of it!"

"She showed extraordinary self-control, certainly," said M. de Beaucrillon; "very few women could go through such an ordeal without betraying themselves. And by heavens she does know how to love a man!" he added, in a tone of admiration that had a ring of envy in it.

"Better than she knows how to love a woman," retorted Sibyl. "To think that she could be so treacherous!"

"*Quelle bêtise!*" and M. de Beaucrillon threw back his head with a contemptuous laugh.

"It *was* treacherous of her," repeated Sibyl, her eyes glittering.

"It would have been treacherous to Basil if she had betrayed his secret. *Seigneur Dieu, quelle étude de mœurs moscovites!*" M. de Beaucrillon laughed again, and rose, and began to walk about the room. "No, *ma*

*chère amie*," he went on, "such a romance could never be acted in any country under heaven but Russia. Such a series of exaggerations, such a jumble of chivalry and cowardice, of generosity and selfishness! It passes human understanding."

"You mean French understanding. You are so *chauvin*, Gaston; you never can see things from any but the French point of view."

"Very likely, *ma chère amie;* just as you can only see them from the Russian point of view. A Frenchman in Basil's place would, ten to one, have fallen in love with Narka, as a boy; would perhaps—well, he certainly never would, as a man, have elected to marry her."

"Why, you said just now that no man in Basil's place could have done otherwise."

"Precisely—in Basil's place; but a Frenchman would never have put himself in Basil's place; but having taken her money, and put her life and liberty in peril, and brought her into such terrible tribulation, a Frenchman would not have gone back to Russia and lived in luxury at court, and left the woman he owed all that to in every sort of hardship. Basil ought not to have left his money debt unpaid all this time, at any rate. Why did he not tell the Prince about it?"

"My father?" cried Sibyl. "Basil knew better than to do that. My father would have cursed him."

"*Et après?* We are not in the days of the patriarchs, and curses break no bones. *Ma chère*, your men have something to be desired; there is a flaw in their chivalry at its best. But your women—by Heaven, they are a splendid race! Narka is a grand specimen of them, and Basil would be a scoundrel if he threw her over for all the curses of all the papas in holy Russia."

Sibyl could not wish Basil to be a scoundrel, but neither could she face the other alternative. Surely there must be some way out of the difficulty; surely Providence would rescue the pride of the Zorokoffs from this shame, would save the holy place from that abomination of abominations, Jewish blood! She sat still, except for the nervous mechanical action of twisting her handkerchief into a tight rope, unconscious that her fingers were tearing the costly rag to shreds. The gong sounded, announcing a visitor.

"I hope no one is coming up here," she said, impatiently. "Ring to forbid it."

M. de Beaucrillon rang the bell which sounded the desired prohibition, but before a servant could appear, Marguerite walked into the boudoir. They both greeted her with an exclamation of relief.

"Well, what news?—have you seen her?" said Sibyl.

"No; she has been before the Petit Parquet all the morning; but one of the officials told me that she is to be taken from the depot to-night to St. Lazare."

"Ah! then there is a true case against her?" said Gaston. "There will be a trial?"

"Evidently. But I shall see Narka herself to-morrow."

"Oh, Marguerite," cried Sibyl, "you don't know half the trouble. Basil is engaged to her! he is going to marry her!—*Narka!*"

Marguerite uttered something inarticulate, and blushed slowly.

"Yes, it is not to be believed," protested Sibyl, misinterpreting the blush and the exclamation. "And fancy her never breathing a word of it to any of us!—to *me*, that she pretended to love so! It is enough to make one loathe the whole race more than ever!"

M. de Beaucrillon shrugged his shoulders, and turned away with an impatient expletive.

"Perhaps Basil forbade her to tell," Marguerite pleaded.

"Of course he did," said M. de Beaucrillon, facing round. "You talk like a fool, Sibyl. And what difference would it have made if she had told you? Would that have reconciled you to the marriage? Not a whit."

"I should have felt that she had behaved loyally to me."

"Bah! Her first loyalty was due to Basil. And she has proved that right nobly. The only pity is she's not a Narichkin or a Woronsoff."

"Yes, that is just the pity. But she is neither the one nor the other; she is a Jewess. *You* cannot understand what that means to people of our caste in Russia; but Narka does, and I cannot understand how her own pride did not protect us. I wonder she did not shrink from bringing the disgrace of her Jewish blood into our house."

"What rank nonsense you are talking!" said M. de Beaucrillon, all his chivalry and manliness enlisted on Narka's side by this savage exaggeration of scorn. "She has every quality that can ennoble and endear a woman, and Basil loves her."

"Does he? He had not the tone of a man who was in love. My conviction is, he asked her in a moment of exuberant feeling, from a sense of honor, and that he regrets it in his heart."

"By-the-way," said M. de Beaucrillon, turning to Marguerite, "you have not heard the story yet." And he told her briefly of the ransom, the flight, the papers left with Narka, and the trouble they had brought upon her.

"Oh, Sibyl, is it any wonder that Basil loves her?"

Marguerite pleaded. "How could he have done less than make her an offer of his hand?"

"Perhaps not," replied Sibyl; "but Narka took an unworthy advantage in accepting it. She knew the offer was made in a moment of extraordinary excitement, under almost overpowering pressure of motives; she ought to have said, 'Wait a year, and then, if you are of the same mind, ask me again.'"

"I wonder how many men would have been of the same mind at the end of a year!" said Marguerite, with a toss of her head.

M. de Beaucrillon looked at her in amused surprise. "You little skeptic, where did you get your estimate of us, I should like to know? I dare say you are right enough, though," he added. "All the same, I'm not sure but that the ficklest among us would prefer the woman who took him at his word—the woman who loved him would be sure to do that; and Narka loves Basil, and no mistake."

"Then, if she loves him, she must do him good," said Marguerite. "Oh, Sibyl, won't you remember all she has suffered for Basil's sake, and try to love her?"

"I have got first to try to forgive her," Sibyl replied, coldly. She looked as cold and hard as if she had been turned to ice.

Marguerite had been prepared for a great deal, but the sight of this frozen hardness under that soft, smiling, sympathetic exterior shocked her inexpressibly.

"What is there to be done?" she said, addressing her brother. "Prince Krinsky will help, will he not?"

"We don't know that yet," replied Gaston. "If, as we fear—as Basil fears—the trouble comes from meddling with Russian politics, the Russian ambassador may refuse to interfere."

"But he has a wife, a daughter? Princess Marie, who is so young, surely she will be kind? Go to her, Sibyl, and tell her everything. Tell her that Basil loves Narka, and is engaged to be married to her."

Sibyl gave a little sardonic laugh. "That would not be the way to touch her: no woman cares to help the rival who has supplanted her. Marie would hate Narka; in her place, any girl would, unless she were an angel."

"And why should she not be an angel? Nothing makes angels or devils of people like believing them to be such. Go to Marie as if you believed she was an angel; tell her everything, and trust to her pity and generosity. Dear Sibyl, do!"

While Marguerite pleaded and entreated, Sibyl seemed to be rapidly debating the question in her own mind; she was looking fixedly out of the window, her features agitated, her hands nervously moving in that unconscious, mechanical twisting of her handkerchief. Suddenly her brow cleared, like a person who sees a way out of a difficulty, and has determined to follow it.

"Yes, you are right," she said; "that is the best thing to do. We must wait till Basil comes back, as we promised him, and if he has no reason for preventing it, I will go at once to Marie and try if she is of the stuff that angels are made of."

Marguerite had now done all that was possible for the moment; so, promising to let them know when she had seen Narka, went away.

M. de Beaucrillon, observant of the courtesies which French gentlemen never fail in to the women of their family, saw her down-stairs, and then returned to the boudoir. He was struck immediately by the change that had taken place in Sibyl. The strained, angry,

perplexed look had entirely passed away from her countenance, and it now wore a resolute, almost a radiant expression. Was it the hope of saving Narka from a horrible fate that had suddenly flushed her pale cheeks and lighted those lamps of triumph in her eyes? What else could it be? And yet, for the first time, as he looked at his wife, M. de Beaucrillon did not think Sibyl beautiful.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

Narka was alone in her cell at St. Lazare. No one had been to see her. She had waited and watched all the day long. Every echoing step on the stone corridor made her pulses quicken with hope: it might be Marguerite, or Sibyl, or even Basil. But the day dragged on to its close, the bars and bolts of the prison were drawn, and no one came.

Narka had not slept the previous night, and she had hardly tasted food since her arrest; she was physically exhausted, and her nerves were strained and excited to the verge of delirium. When the night closed in she was in the state of one prepared to see visions. For a while the lamp burning outside sent a tawny light into her cell through the window above the door; but this was put out, and then all was black as the tomb, and a horror of great darkness fell upon her. She could not say how long it lasted; but suddenly the external blackness was pierced through by a vivid inward illumination. Her whole life, from childhood to the present hour, passed before her, with its sorrows, its blighted hopes, its pathetic failures; every circumstance became invested with a high prophetic meaning, every cruel and humiliating event was instinct with a supreme significance, every incident pointed to momentous issues. Her faith, hitherto a sort of dreamy mysticism, gradually kindled to a kind of frenzy, that she mistook for inspiration. She saw the divine scheme for the redemption of humanity unfolding before her like a

scroll, and she read her own part distinctly written there. God, who had created and redeemed every individual soul, could not overlook the very least of His creatures; with Him there was neither greater nor lesser; the monarch on his throne and the moudjik in his hovel were of equal value in His sight; the same hand which fashioned the eagle and bid it soar and fix the mid-day sun, also created the worm, and bade it crawl upon the earth, and both were His creatures, equally entitled to His care. It was, nevertheless, in the order of His providence that amongst men there should be higher and lower; that some should play a grand part in life, and some an obscure one; that some should command and enjoy, and even sin with impunity, while others were condemned to suffer for the sins of all. And these latter were His chosen partners in the plan of redemption. They were to enter into glory with Him through suffering, and become like unto gods.

As the symbolism of her destiny revealed itself to Narka, her heart swelled with a sense of vengeful triumph. She exulted in her Christ-like mission, and in spirit trampled under foot the Pharisees and tyrants who persecuted her. The night wore on in this frenzy of pride and hallucination. The prison clock told away the hours. The dawn broke, but in the cell all was still dark. Suddenly a gleam of light crept in through the window above the door, and Narka, looking up as if something had touched her, saw the white figure of the crucifix, alone visible in the encircling blackness.

"Yes," she said within herself, "it is we who can look down from our gibbet on the children of this world, the fools who feast and revel, while we agonize with Christ in His passion! To us, instead of ashes, He will give a crown and a garment of glory for an afflicted spirit.

Those who have dwelt in the tombs shall rejoice and sing canticles, while those who have slept in palaces on pillows of down shall howl for grief and rend their garments!"

In the weird, shadowy dawnlight her thoughts grew concrete, and took tangible form. She saw a long procession marching past—victors and saints who had blessed their generation, and left the world better than they found it; but they were not the prosperous ones whose course had been through flowery meads, full of sunshine and peace; they were men who had suffered, who had known poverty, humiliation, and defeat. She saw that never since the beginning of the world had a nation's wrong been made right, or a people's sorrow consoled, by the rich and the satisfied, who had gone through life making merry, crowned with flowers, and sung to and smiled upon; these conquests had been achieved by pilgrims who toiled through the desert in hunger and thirst and nakedness, or by martyrs who walked over the fiery ploughshares.

Narka had always vaguely held that suffering was in itself an agency of redemption, and meritorious apart from all merit or response in the sufferer. The old creed was now asserting itself with the passionate intensity which belongs rather to fanaticism than to faith. She looked upon herself as a victim for her people, an object of complacency to the court of heaven. Her mind, her senses, her heart, inflamed by these stern and sanguine orthodoxies, all shared the intoxication of the vision they had conjured up. Religious stimulants have a close and very terrible parallel with alcoholic ones, especially when, as in Narka's case, the passion of love finds itself mixed up with them. In this splendid apotheosis, where she was the central figure, she was

not alone—Basil Zorokoff was by her side, he was whispering in her ear; every fibre of her heart was thrilling to what he whispered; she felt his breath upon her cheek, she felt the warm clasp of his arm round her. Ah! let fate do its worst upon her; with that arm clasping her she could never be wholly miserable. But suddenly the smile of rapture that trembled on her lips died away. What fool's paradise had she wandered into? She was in prison, and so perhaps was Basil, for all she knew. There was that box containing the articles in his handwriting! If the writing should be traced? Narka shuddered, but quickly dismissing the horrible thought, she remembered that Basil was in France, and that his own government could not touch him, and the French police were not likely to be able to identify the writing of a Russian.

The great clock struck five, and the profound stillness began to be broken by those sounds which announce, even in a prison, that the inmates are awakening to the activities of life. Warders came and went along the flagged passages, doors were opened and shut, the bell summoned the prisoners to the scant morning meal. Narka was not in the category of those who had to obey its call. Her food was brought to her. She was too faint and feverish to feel any appetite, but she knew that this was partly the effect of hunger, so she ate a few mouthfuls, and went back to her visions. The morning wore on. It was near noon, and she was still sitting on the edge of her bed, listless, tired, her mind strained between something like ecstasy and stupor, when the door of her cell opened, and some one pronounced her name. She started, stood straight up, and felt herself clasped in Sibyl's arms.

"Basil?" she said, in a frightened whisper, and disen-

gaging herself, she fixed her passionate, yearning eyes on Sibyl.

"He has told us everything."

"And you forgive me? You forgive us both?"

"Forgive you! My brave, generous Narka, what have I to forgive?" And Sibyl kissed her again, tenderly, clingingly, and then she drew her to the bed, and they sat down together.

Narka was crying; it was an immense relief both to her nerves and her heart, and Sibyl let the tears flow on, wiping them away gently with her own little cambric handkerchief, and kissing the heavy white lids betweentimes. But Narka was not one to indulge long in the luxury of emotion. She drew a deep breath, and then, lifting her head from Sibyl's shoulder,

"Tell me what has happened," she said. "Has he been arrested?"

"Who? Basil? No. Did you hear that he had been?"

"I have heard nothing. I have seen nobody. I thought Marguerite would have come."

"She has been trying to get to see you from the first, but they made difficulties. Gaston saw the president of the Petit Parquet this morning."

"Ah! And what did he tell him? About the articles in that box? Do they know who wrote them?"

"They have not got the box. It seems that just as the detective was carrying it off, a man fell upon him and knocked him down, and seized it and made away with it."

"Oh! Who was the man, did they say?"

"He was a rebel, who had been wounded in the head during the *émeute.* Gaston did not hear his name."

"It was Antoine Drex!" Narka exclaimed, with sudden elation.

"Oh, Narka!" said Sibyl, shocked at what seemed to her like cynical complacency in the disreputable circumstances; "what could have induced you to mix yourself up with those low men and their politics?"

"I did not mix myself up with them," protested Narka. "I have never meddled in their politics here. Why should I?"

"But you have meddled in Russian politics. They say you have been associating with the worst revolutionists, and frequenting their meetings. They say you were at one on the 10th where a plot was discussed for murdering our Emperor."

"That is a lie. I was not there. And if I had been, I should certainly have not voted for such an insane crime as that. What stupidity! What good could it do to murder the Emperor? Who could have said I was there? Not that it matters. Even if I had been, I am in a foreign country, and beyond the reach of Russian tyranny. Their slanders can't touch me here."

"Dear, you are mistaken," said Sibyl, with a certain tender hesitation; "if it is proved, or even asserted on good authority, that you have been mixed up with the revolutionary movement, the Russian law will reach you here just as surely as if you were at home."

"How so?" Narka started perceptibly.

"If the Russian authorities demand it, our ambassador will be obliged to claim you as a Russian subject."

"What do you mean?" said Narka, turning a white face to her.

"Dearest, did you not know? As a Russian subject, guilty of high-treason, you will be handed over to our ambassador and taken back to be tried in Russia."

Narka stared at her, every feature convulsed, while a cold chill of horror stole the heat out of her blood.

"*They will send me back to Russia?*" she murmured, in a voice that sounded like a whisper in the dark.

"Is it possible that you did not know? Oh, my darling, what blind folly you have been guilty of in meddling with politics and conspiracies! And what was Ivan Gorff about that he did not warn you? He knows the perils and the risks of it all. It was unpardonable of him not to have warned and protected you. But perhaps you did not tell Ivan? If you would but trust your friends, Narka!"

But Narka did not hear what she was saying. Her lips had fallen apart; there came a blackness under her eyes as if they reflected suddenly some invisible spectacle of woe or horror; her hands opened and closed nervously, and then crept slowly up and coiled round her neck; she presented an image of terror and despair awful to behold. Sibyl watched her with intensely curious but not unpitiful eyes; she pitied her sincerely, but she pitied herself more; she wanted to save Narka, but she wanted first to save Basil and the pride of the Zorokoffs. The moment had now come, she thought, for proposing the only expedient which might do this. She laid her hand on Narka's tense arm; it shuddered under the touch.

"This is what I have dreaded from the moment I heard of your being arrested," she said. "I lay awake all last night thinking how I could save you, and praying to God to show me a way. For, Narka, there is no use in trying to deceive ourselves: you will be handed over to the Russian government and taken to St. Petersburg, and then— But, darling, there is one chance still of saving you. I know not how to propose it, for the sacrifice will be almost worse than the sacrifice of your life."

Narka did not make a sign, but sat staring at vacancy, her eyes still riveted on that unseen horror.

"Beloved," continued Sibyl, in her soft, caressing voice, "if you are sent back to Russia, it means Kronstadt"—a tremor ran through Narka—"or Siberia; in either case a fate as cruel as death—and you are parted from Basil forever. If you give him up voluntarily now, you will remain free, and you will be still his sister and mine."

Narka did not speak, but she moved her head imperceptibly toward Sibyl; the movement seemed to say, "What do you mean?"

Sibyl stole one arm round her neck, and speaking rapidly, "Oh, my darling," she said, "if I could take the sting out of the sacrifice for you!... but the alternative is so horrible it will give you courage. Renounce Basil; tell him you have ceased to care for him; that you will not marry him because you don't love him. He will then be free to go and offer himself to Prince Krinsky's daughter, and ask her to obtain your release."

Narka at last was moved from her stony immobility. She slowly drew away her hands from about her neck and dropped them, and looked at Sibyl. "*Tell him that I do not love him?*" she repeated. "He would not believe me; he would know that it was a lie."

"He knew it once, dear; but you may have changed since then. How many women would! Remember it is nearly two years since you have met."

"It is not three days! I saw him here before you did. He came to me the moment he arrived in Paris, and he knows whether or not I have ceased to love him. Yes, he knows—he knows that I love him with my whole soul; that to give him up would be to me worse than death, worse than Kronstadt!" Her eyes, a moment

ago fixed and lifeless, grew suddenly incandescent as they met Sibyl's, glittering with fury.

"So you have been deceiving me to the very last!" Sibyl said, with a light laugh that sounded horrid; "while I have been watching and praying, and straining every nerve to save you, you have been playing the hypocrite, spreading your toils round my brother, and acting a living lie! a false friend! a companion of men who plot murder! You are a base, guilty woman!"

"Guilty?" repeated Narka, and she rose slowly to her feet, no longer the cowed, terror-stricken creature of a moment ago, but a grand, passionate woman, strong in her innocence, and conscious by her sufferings of being set high above this proud daughter of princes—"guilty? Look at that symbol." And she pointed to the white Figure on the wall. "We shall both of us be judged by it, condemned or acquitted according to the likeness we bear to it. Which of us, you or I, as we stand here, most resembles Him? Is it you with your wealth, your splendor, and your high place in this world, your feasting and purple and fine linen, your pampered ease; or I, in humiliation and poverty, in my body seamed with scars, marked and cut with the hangman's lash"—Sibyl uttered a low cry, and hid her face—"with my heart pierced by the murder of my kindred, with my soul made sorrowful to death by the sufferings of my people, and the sight of the wrongs inflicted on them by you and your caste? Is it I, in my nakedness of this world's goods, in imprisonment and persecution, in the martyr's death that perhaps awaits me? Let the Christ speak, and say which of us two is guilty, which of us two deserves that glance of recognition reserved to those who here below have been likened to the Man of Sorrows!"

Narka had begun in a husky, agitated voice, but as

she went on it rose, under the stress of irrepressible emotion, to high vibrating tones. As she stood pointing to the Figure on the cross, Sibyl almost expected to hear a voice resound in the dark cell, uttering the awful sentence of acquittal and denunciation: "Come, ye blessed! —Depart, ye accursed!"

"Narka! Narka!" she cried, cowering before the terrible wrath of the woman she had scorned a moment ago, and who now stood like the avenger of the brethren, accusing her before the judgment-seat; "why do you curse me? I have not done those things; I had no hand in the murder of your kindred or in the sorrows that have come upon you. I have loved you always; but you broke away from me; you turned against us, and took part with those who hate us. Why did not you trust me? I wanted to save you—God knows I did —and you upbraid me as if I had been seeking to destroy you."

But Sibyl too had had her hour of exaltation. Her nerves, taxed to their utmost by the strain of the last three days, broke down, and she burst into a fit of hysterical weeping.

Narka seemed hardly conscious of her presence. Her whole soul was torn asunder by this choice that was thrust upon her of renouncing Basil or going back to encounter again those horrors of which she had never spoken to any human being.

The hour struck without either of them hearing it; but it was a relief to both when the warder came and said it was time for Sibyl to come away. When the door had closed upon her, Narka flung herself upon the bed, and her bursting heart once more found relief in a passionate flood of tears.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

When Basil went in search of Ivan on the morning of Narka's arrest, he heard that his friend had left town, and, as usual, without saying where he was going or when he would return. Basil went every day to the house to inquire, and on the fourth day, late in the afternoon, he walked into Ivan's room, and found him smoking a pipe and reading the newspaper.

"You have not heard what has happened?" said Basil, guessing from his quiet air and occupation that he knew nothing.

"What?" said Ivan, removing his pipe, and opening his eyes in hilarious curiosity.

"Narka has been arrested. She has been four days in prison."

Ivan dropped the newspaper with an oath.

Basil related all he knew of the event. Then he said: "Who has done it? Can it be Schenk?"

Ivan did not answer. He laid his clinched hands on his knees, and bent forward, as if lost in perplexity. He knew of Schenk's passion for Narka, and Olga Borzidoff knew it; she had complained bitterly to Ivan of Schenk's unfaithfulness, and she was a violent, vindictive woman, whose jealousy would be unscrupulous. If Schenk had let out the fact that Narka had documents in her possession, Olga would not have hesitated to use the knowledge in order to destroy her. There was no use, however, in confiding these suspicions to Basil.

"Schenk has never done it," he said; "he is not capable of it; but he may have been fool enough to let out something that compromised her. If he has, he deserves the knout!" Ivan ground his teeth with a sinister sound. "But the thing is, what is to be done for her? Your sister must have interest at court. She will use it, won't she? Napoleon, for all he is a despot, has a man's heart, and can be pitiful, and the Empress is a woman."

"That won't help, if it can be proved that Narka has been mixed up in our work. If they accuse her of offending against the French law, well and good; the people here may help; but if not, there is no one but Krinsky who could do it."

"That will be the devil to pay!" said Ivan, savagely.

"Yes, that will be the devil to pay," repeated Basil, and he got up and walked to the window, his hands thrust deep in his pockets. "You see," he said, still looking out of the window, and speaking with his back to Ivan, "as those infernal papers, which I believe are at the bottom of it all, have been rescued, they have no material proof of her having worked with us; they may accuse her, but if they can't prove anything, they will have to let her go. The French law would protect her so far, would it not?"

"If the Russian government say they have proof that she has been conspiring—and they won't stick at saying it if it suits them—the French law can't refuse to give her up," said Ivan.

"In that case, my sister must go at once to Krinsky."

"She can't go to him to-day, nor to-morrow either; he left Paris last night for Berlin."

"Confound it! did he?" said Basil, turning suddenly round. "And when is he to be back?"

"I don't know. He is to stop at Berlin two days, and then, unless his business is arranged at once with Bismarck, he will go on to St. Petersburg."

"Have you any idea when the trial is likely to come on?" asked Basil.

"I don't suppose before a month at least."

"And they will keep her in prison all that time untried?"

"Yes. They have got their *prison préventive* here like us, for all their boasted liberty and justice. But it will serve a good purpose for once by giving Krinsky time to be back before the trial comes on."

Basil said nothing for a moment. Then, "We can't wait for Krinsky to come back," he said. "I must start after him at once, and secure him before he leaves for St. Petersburg. If I take the express to-night, I am safe to catch him at Berlin. I shall be able to get to see him through Z——, of our embassy there. He is not a bad fellow, and though my father made a mess between him and me, I don't believe he is as savage against me as they made out. Anyhow, there is nothing else to be done. I will drive now to Sibyl's, and tell her I am off." He pulled out his watch. "It is five o'clock. I have a couple of hours to do a few things and eat a mouthful before I start."

"I will go out with you," said Ivan; "I must see Schenk if he be in town; I must find out something about this devilish business."

The two friends went down-stairs together; then they parted. Basil hailed a cab, and drove to the Rue St. Dominique.

Sibyl was out. She had left home three hours ago, the servant said, so was likely to be soon back. But Basil could not wait. He went into the library, and

wrote a note to M. de Beaucrillon, telling him of his departure for Berlin, and the motive of it.

Sibyl, meantime, had gone to make a call at the Russian embassy. She had not carried out her intention of appealing to Marie Krinsky on behalf of Narka. Both Basil and M. de Beaucrillon were of opinion that it was better to make sure, in the first instance, whether the interference of the Prince was necessary. But she had her own scheme to forward, and a visit to Princess Krinsky was likely to do this. She learned to her disappointment that the Prince had left the night before for Berlin, and the ladies for Fontainebleau that morning.

As she drove in under her own gateway, M. de Beaucrillon's brougham was moving away from before the steps of the house. He met her in the hall with two letters in his hand. One was Basil's, the other was from Marguerite.

"Come in here a moment," he said, and they went into the library. "Here is a slate on our heads!" he exclaimed. "Basil is off to Berlin after Krinsky, and Marguerite tells me the trial comes on on Monday. It may be all over before Basil will have seen Krinsky. Though, for the matter of that, we don't know yet whether Krinsky can be of any use."

Sibyl took the two notes from his hand without speaking. There is an electric, instantaneous comprehension that comes to the brain in moments of supreme excitement, and enables it to seize all the points of a question and arrive at a conclusion without any process of argument. Such a moment had come to Sibyl now. With one glance she saw the whole situation, the circumstances, the possibilities. Basil's absence at this crisis was providential. The trial would be over, per-

haps, before he heard it had begun, and there was an end of the terror which had haunted her of his appearing in court and publicly compromising himself from a sense of chivalrous loyalty to Narka.

"I must see at once about getting counsel," said M. de Beaucrillon, too selflessly absorbed in Narka's trouble and the impending crisis to stop to consider the motive of his wife's silence. "There is no time to lose. I will go at once to Maître X——. If I am late for dinner, don't wait for me."

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

It was not often that so great a treat as this trial of Narka's was provided for the sensation-loving Parisian public. Amongst the numbers who crushed in to assist at it there was not one who remembered a trial which contained such original and dramatic elements. The prisoner was a young girl of rare beauty and brilliant gifts, and among the witnesses were to figure a *grande dame* and a Sister of Charity. The judge and counsel had been besieged with applications for ten times more places than the court contained, and when the day came the crowd even outside was so great that the police had much to do to facilitate the entrance of those who had tickets.

The court was densely filled long before the entrance of the judge, but curiosity reached its climax when the door opposite the judgment-seat opened, and the prisoner, walking between two gendarmes, was led to the bar.

Narka had been so exhausted and strained by the week's imprisonment that on the eve it had seemed to her impossible she could go through the ordeal of this trial; but when the morrow came, and with it the challenge for immediate effort, her splendid young vitality asserted itself, and her high courage rose to the occasion. She was luminously pale, but there was no lack of fire in her eyes, and no trace of weakness in her bearing, as she stood at the bar. A murmur, partly of admiration, partly of curiosity, rose from every part of the audience; but this quickly subsided, and profound silence reigned in the court.

The case against the prisoner was briefly stated: from the time of her arrival in Paris she had consorted with conspirators of various nationalities, and attended revolutionary meetings where plots were hatched against the governments and the lives of kings; she had gone to live in a district where disaffection was rampant; she had received treasonable documents, and sheltered ringleaders of the recent *émeute* and notoriously bad characters, etc.

The first witness called up was Olga Borzidoff. She swore that the prisoner had to her knowledge habitually frequented revolutionary meetings, and that on the 10th instant she had been present at one where a scheme for the assassination of the Emperor of the French had been arranged, and the prisoner was chosen by lots to give the signal for throwing the bomb-shell into his carriage. The witness had been so horrified by the proceedings and plans discussed at this meeting that she had gone immediately and given warning to the police; she had herself assisted at former meetings of the sort, ignorant of their sinister character; but her eyes had been opened on this occasion, and her conscience awakened. Olga Borzidoff deposed in a spirit of vindictive personal rancor which greatly damaged the weight of her evidence, and at last she became so violent and aggressive that the judge was obliged to call her to order.

Madame Blaquette was next called up, and came on whining and whimpering, and conveying her distress to Narka by glances and gesticulations. She gave her evidence incoherently, contradicting herself at every sentence; she had been beguiled and deceived, she said, by a beggar-woman toward whom she had exercised benevolence to the utmost extent of her means, having on one occasion given the last penny she possessed to

relieve her wants; the woman's ingratitude was a bitter drop in the cup of her manifold disappointments. The landlady was wandering on to explain the nature of these disappointments, when the judge cut her short, and after a series of direct questions discharged her. Her evidence had neither served nor hurt Narka.

Several other witnesses, friends of Olga Borzidoff, were heard, and these swore to the prisoner's presence at the meeting on the 10th. This testimony was, so far, the only substantial charge against her. Then the counsel for the crown made his charge, and the witnesses for the defence followed.

The first called was the Comtesse de Beaucrillon. Sibyl was one of those persons whose charm never deserts them under any circumstances. As she advanced now to the witness box, leaning on her husband's arm, she looked just as charming, just as much at her ease, as if she had been taking part in a court ceremonial, or dispensing cups of tea in her boudoir. She sat down with that languishing grace which always suggested a nymph sinking into the water, and then drew off her gloves and pulled out her Lilliputian handkerchief, scattering a scent of violets that perfumed the heavy air deliciously around her.

After the preliminary formula of questions, the judge said, "How long have you known the prisoner?"

"All my life, monsieur. We were brought up together; we studied together; we were like sisters."

"The prisoner is charged with having become acquainted with revolutionists, and been cognizant of plots against the life of the Emperor of Russia, even while under the roof of Princess Zorokoff."

"Ah! Monsieur le Président, such charges are wicked slanders. My sister Narka was too pure and good to

associate with any but those who were pure and good like herself."

There was an indescribable charm in the way Sibyl said "my sister Narka," in her softly agitated voice.

"Madame," continued the judge, "the court cannot accept sentimental evidence, however convincing it may be. Can you assert upon your oath that to your knowledge the prisoner never associated, was never in communication, while in Russia, with any persons disaffected toward the imperial government?"

Sibyl seemed too horrified to answer. With a marvellous play of feature she looked up at her husband, and clasping her hands nervously, looked back at the judge. "Am *I* suspected of being disaffected to the Emperor's government?" Nothing could have been more perfect than the little bit of comedy; her face and her hands expressed amazement, amusement, and wounded loyalty all at once, and the pantomime told more effectively in Narka's behalf than if she had solemnly sworn to belief in her innocence.

"You, madame, are absolutely above suspicion," protested the judge, feeling that he had made a mistake in rousing the sympathies of the public on the side of this sensitive, high-bred lady by inferentially accusing her of a vulgar crime.

Sibyl saw her advantage, and immediately the great crystal drops welled up into her light blue eyes and trembled there, and then rolled off her curled lashes. She was one of those dangerous, not-to-be-trusted women to whom tears are becoming, and she knew it. "I beg your pardon, M. le Président," she said, her voice quivering with repressed emotion; "but if you have ever had a sister whom you loved and trusted with your whole heart, you will understand that I cannot listen unmoved

to such horrible insinuations against mine." Overcome by her feelings, she covered her face and sobbed gently.

A hum of admiration and respect made itself heard in the court.

Sibyl, after struggling for a moment with her emotion, lifted her head with the air of one nerving herself for courageous effort, but the judge, obeying the murmured desire of the court, said, "The witness may retire."

"Let Sœur Marguerite be heard."

No more striking contrast could have been found than that which this witness presented to the last. Instead of the *blonde élégante*, trailing her silken skirts with undulating grace, scattering the scent of violets around, and playing on the court with her wiles, her sudden tears, her harmonies and blandishments, there appeared at the bar a small, well-shaped young woman clothed in a gray woollen gown and a broad white head-gear, from under which there looked out a youthful face with irregular features, a nose full of character, imperceptibly *retroussé*, and a pair of wistful brown eyes alight with courage, simplicity, and truth. The shapely hands, roughened with work and the weather, were slipped into her wide sleeves, and Marguerite in the witness box looked like a diligent little scholar who came up for examination, primed and loaded, afraid of nothing except of being confused into a wrong answer from nervousness.

"What is your name?" asked the judge.

"Sœur Marguerite, M. le Juge."

"Say M. le Président," corrected some one in a *sotto voce*.

"Pardon! M. le Président," she repeated, with a blush.

The usual interrogations followed, and then the judge said, "Why did the prisoner go to live at La Villette?"

"Because it is cheap, M. le Président."

"How did she spend her time there—do you know?"

"She gave lessons, M. le Président; and she went about with me visiting the sick poor. She is a capital sick-nurse."

"Did she not keep low company?"

"She kept company with me, M. le Président."

"You know what I mean, ma sœur; she associated with the bad characters of the place?"

"So do I and my sisters, M. le Président."

"Vive Sœur Marguerite!" shouted a voice, and the cry was taken up in chorus at the end of the hall, where La Villette was largely represented. The judge turned round angrily; but before he could speak, Marguerite drew her hand from her sleeve and made a little downward gesture, as if she were slapping a naughty child. "Hush, will you!" she cried; "do you want to get me into trouble?"

This irregular proceeding had the desired effect; so the judge overlooked it, and went on.

"You are acquainted with a man named Antoine Drex?"

"Yes, M. le Président; I have long been acquainted with Antoine Drex."

"He bears a detestable character—a rioter, a drunkard; he was a notoriously bad husband; he used to beat his wife?"

Marguerite put her head first a little to one side, then a little to the other, like a meditative robin. "Well, M. le Président, he was not a model husband; but his wife was very aggravating; she had a tongue that was going all day long, and she took to drink before he did. Our sisters always pitied Antoine very much."

"What! a wicked revolutionist who incited the people to bloodshed?"

"M. le Président, he was not so bad as that; *c'était un désespéré, mais pas un révolté.* That is the difference. When he was out of work and had no food, the hunger went to his head. It is so with them all. But he was not a bad fellow. He loved his mother, and was always good to her; and he would often share his crust with a hungry neighbor."

"So would any man who was not a brute."

"Ah! M. le Président, if that were true, there would be no *émeutes.* It is hunger that sends the *ouvrier* down into the street. He is not wicked; he is *bon enfant* if you give him bread enough; but he goes mad on an empty stomach, and that hunger-madness is the worst of all."

There was a rumor in the court expressing horror and assent.

"That is a subject that would carry us too far from the point in question, ma sœur," said the judge: "the question is, did the prisoner, knowing the character Antoine Drex bears, associate with him, and connive at his evil doings by hiding him from the pursuit of the law?"

"M. le Président, I cannot answer for the other people who hid Antoine from the police; but I don't deny that we did. He came to us one morning and asked us to shelter him, and we let him in, and he went away without telling us."

"Yes, he went away to intercept the police, who had just got possession of a box containing papers that would have convicted the prisoner beyond any doubt. Ma sœur, do you know what those papers were?"

"No, I do not; I never saw them; and Mademoiselle Larik never told me what they were."

"You know that she held revolutionary doctrines,

and connived at, if she did not participate in, the crime of regicide?"

"I know nothing of the sort, and I don't believe a word of it."

"She frequented meetings where such plots were discussed?"

"If she did, it must have been as the prophet Daniel frequented the lions' den: she was taken there by force or by fraud. But I don't believe she was ever present at such a meeting."

"There are witnesses to swear that she was present at one where she was designated as an accomplice in an attempt on the life of the Emperor."

"M. le Président, if a court full of witnesses swore to that, I would not believe them."

"But if they proved it, ma sœur?"

"Above all, if they proved it! What a pitiful sort of faith that is that could be invalidated by proofs!"

There was a laugh in the court. The judge peered over his spectacles at the witness, as if debating whether to join, at least tacitly, in the *mouvement d'hilarité*, or call her to order for disrespect to the solemnity of justice. His human sympathies and his sense of humor prevailed.

"Ma sœur," he said, and his sharp eyes twinkled unjudiciously as they peered at her through his glasses, "your doctrine concerning faith and testimony differs *in toto* from that of the court. There are witnesses to prove that on the 10th inst. the prisoner was present at the meeting in question, and that evidence makes fatally against her, unless you can bring forward witnesses to swear that she was in some other place that day while the meeting was going on."

Marguerite's face lighted up with a triumphant ex-

pression. "On the 10th?" she said. "At what hour was the meeting, M. le Président?"

"From one in the afternoon to past three."

"Then I can swear, and bring others to swear, that she was not present at it. She was with me, visiting a sick child."

There was a sudden excitement in the court at this.

"You are sure of that, ma sœur?"

"I am perfectly sure of it."

"And you say there were others present?"

Marguerite hesitated a moment: Antoine Drex and his old mother were not imposing witnesses to bring forward.

"There was a crowd outside who saw us both come out of the house where Mademoiselle Larik had been singing to the child. I can easily find out some of the people who were there." Marguerite was conscious of a certain collapse in the strength of her testimony when it came to producing it; but the court was with her, and she felt it. Her own word, her oath, would weigh with them and with the jury more than a score of the most creditable witnesses that could be brought forward, and the timid humility which seemed to make her forget this, and lose sight of her own value altogether, only made her more admirable and sympathetic. A rare and winning advocate she was in her weakness and her courage, her pathos and her humor, clothed in the garb of that voluntary poverty which in its heroic renunciations represents the most persuasive power on earth.

"And you can swear yourself that you were with her on the 10th at the hour named?" said the judge.

"I can swear it. She came down to the House just after our dinner, and she staid with me till I went out,

and then came with me to Antoine Drex's room, where she sang a little sick child to sleep."

There was a loud murmur from every part of the court; it rose almost to a cheer. Narka's eyes were fixed on Marguerite as if she could not look away; the half-fierceness had melted out of her face, and in spite of her immobility those dark eyes, burning under her level brows, betrayed the relenting emotion that was invading and disarming her.

The judge was going to speak, when a movement at the door arrested his attention. A messenger full of haste frayed his way to the judgment-seat, and a short parley followed between him and the judge.

Marguerite had recognized the commissary of police from La Villette. She was alarmed, but not much surprised, when, turning from the judge, he came straight up to her. The curiosity of the audience was greatly excited, and it was not allayed when the commissary, having made some communication to Marguerite, which she received with evident horror and amazement, hurried away with her from the court.

And now it was Narka's turn. It had seemed to her before entering the court that no chance of escape or acquittal remained to her, and in crossing the threshold of the judgment-hall she had left all hope outside; but as the trial went on, and nothing transpired to incriminate Basil, and as one witness after another failed to substantiate any charge against herself, her spirits rose; she began to hope, and regained courage. The only serious point made against her was by Olga Borzidoff, who had sworn to her presence at the meeting on the 10th, and to her having been designated there to give the signal for throwing the bomb-shell; but this false testimony had been wholly refuted by Marguerite,

who had evidently carried the court along with her, and turned the current of justice and of public sentiment strongly in favor of the prisoner. When, therefore, Narka stood up to be examined, she felt ready to undergo the dreaded interrogatory with more self-possession than an hour ago she could have believed possible.

When it came to the question of her having been with Sœur Marguerite at the time she was accused by the woman Borzidoff of being at the meeting, the judge said, "Can you remember any circumstance which would help to prove that alibi?"

"I can, M. le Président," Narka answered, in her clear, metallic tones. "I had lost my voice for more than a month, and that day, when I was with Sœur Marguerite, it suddenly returned. It was very unexpected, and I was greatly excited by it; so was Sœur Marguerite."

"Can you call any witness to prove that you had lost your voice before that day?"

"Yes; M. le Docteur X—— could certify to the fact. He gave me a consultation not long before. I do not recall the date, but he probably could."

The judge was going to put another question, when a note was passed up to him. He read it, and recognized the signature as that of a detective well known to the authorities, and highly esteemed for his honesty and skill.

"You may sit down," the judge said to Narka. Then he added, "Let Jean Godart come forward." And a middle-aged man, dressed like a well-to-do workman, stepped into the witness box.

Narka's heart began to beat again with terror. Was this a clever false witness come to spring a mine under her feet?

The witness having stated his name and surname, and his trade of cabinet-maker, the judge said:

"You were present that afternoon when the prisoner sang in the room occupied by Antoine Drex and his mother?"

"M. le Président, I was amongst the crowd under the window, and I waited to see the singer come out. I wanted badly to see her. I did not see her face well, for she wore a veil, and a hat that came down over her forehead; but I noticed her figure."

"Was the prisoner alone?"

"No; she was with Sœur Marguerite. It was Sœur Marguerite who told us she had been singing to the sick child."

"Why did you want so badly to see the prisoner?"

"Because of her voice: it was the most wonderful voice I ever heard. I am fond of a good song. It is my *petit vice*. I spend many a franc on a ticket up with the gods when a great singer comes to Paris. I have heard the best of them these twenty years past, but I never heard anything like the voice of the person who sang that day in the Cour des Chats."

"What was it like? Describe it to the court."

The witness shook his head. "It would be a difficult thing to describe," he said, with a humorous smile; "but if these gentlemen," looking up at the jury, "can fancy a score of nightingales in a woman's throat, with old cognac and oil poured out all together, they will have some idea of the effect."

The jury were amused, and the public laughed.

"You would know the voice if you heard it again?"

"Parbleu! If I would know it! It made the blood run warm in my veins. I would know it amongst a thousand."

"You remember what the song was?"

"The first was—"

"Stop!" interrupted the judge, quickly. "Write down the name and send it up to me."

While the witness proceeded to do as he was desired, a movement rose and spread in the court. It was arrested immediately when the judge, after reading the paper handed up from the witness, said to the prisoner,

"Can you tell the court what you sang that day?"

"I sang first a Russian ballad, and then 'Mignon's Lament.'" Narka's countenance, for all her self-control, showed plainly with what intense anxiety she was waiting to hear whether the testimony of the detective would corroborate this answer. The court too was hushed in breathless expectation.

"The witness," said the judge, "has written, 'A song in a language I did not understand, and then a song in French that ended, at every verse, *Laissez-moi mourir.*'"

A perfect shout of exultation rose from every part of the hall. Narka flushed crimson, and then grew very white; she was agitated almost beyond the power of self-control.

The prisoner's counsel now followed with his plea, and then the jury retired to consider the verdict.

They returned in ten minutes with a verdict of acquittal.

## CHAPTER XL.

Ivan Gorff had deemed it more prudent, both for Narka and for himself, not to be present at the trial, where there was sure to be a large contingent of Russian spies as well as French detectives. But when the day of the trial came he found it hard to keep away. The suspense and anxiety were almost unbearable. It was not possible to stay quietly in-doors, so he went out and walked about the streets like a troubled spirit, going from one haunt to another, as if something unexpected might turn up to help Narka, or throw light on the unknown authors of her arrest. The more he thought of it, the stronger grew his fear that Schenk had betrayed her. The idea, which had at first been repulsed as a groundless suspicion, took shape when he found that Schenk had left town the day before the arrest; and then, as the days went by, and he neither came nor wrote, suspicion grew and hardened into conviction. Ivan had quickly detected the German's passion for Narka, and shrewdly suspected that Schenk had declared it, and if so, he had of course been scornfully rejected. As Ivan paced the streets he pictured to himself the scene: Narka startled into indignant surprise, answering him with two flashes of lightning from her dark eyes, and Schenk, goaded out of his cold-blooded sleekness, pressing his suit; then perhaps threatening—for she was in his power to an extent. Ivan's blue eyes scintillated with inextinguishable laughter as he clinched his hands, swinging heavily by his side, and tramped on. Partly drawn by these cogitations, and partly obeying the blind

impulse that prompted him to pursue his aimless march, he walked on to La Villette and to Narka's house. The place looked just as if nothing had happened; she might have been sitting inside at her work; the door on the street stood open as usual. Ivan stepped in. It was dark in the narrow entry after the brilliant sunshine, but there was light enough for him to see a man standing at the door of the landlady's rooms, opposite to Narka's, as if waiting to be let in. Ivan at a glance recognized Schenk.

The two were equally surprised to meet.

"Oh, it is you!" said Schenk, coming forward, and he held out his hand.

Ivan fell back a step. "How much money did they give you for it?" he said, hissing out the words between his teeth.

"What do you mean?" demanded Schenk.

"You know what I mean. How much did they give you for selling Narka Larik to the police here?"

"Look here," said Schenk, and he came a step nearer, fixing his green eyes on Ivan's, that were blazing like a tiger's; "take back that lie, or I'll knock it down your throat!"

Ivan clinched his hand, and hit out at him; but Schenk, stepping aside in time, avoided the blow, and Ivan struck the wall with his might, breaking his knuckles with the violence of the collision. The pain blinded and maddened him for a moment, and before he had recovered his senses Schenk drew his cane-sword and ran him through the body. Ivan staggered, and then fell heavily to the ground.

Schenk knelt down, wiped his blade carefully in his victim's coat, slipped it back into the cane, and walked away.

Nobody passed through the entry for nearly an hour. Then a lace-mender who lived on the fifth story came down, and hurrying out, knocked her foot against the prostrate body. Her scream brought in a woman who was passing.

"A man murdered!" exclaimed the two, peering down at the white face, and then at the pools of blood around.

In five minutes a crowd had collected; in five more the commissary of police was there, taking down the *procès-verbal.* Before he had finished, the doctor arrived.

"Life is not extinct," said the medical man, after putting his ear to Ivan's heart. "Is there a room where he could be taken, close by, here on the ground-floor?"

Some one ran to the concierge and got the key of Narka's door, and Ivan was lifted in and laid upon the bed. Then restoratives were quickly applied and the wound was attended to. Gradually consciousness returned. Ivan carried his blank gaze round the room, and began to realize where he was. "Have they condemned her?" he asked, in a faint voice.

"Ah! it was, then, a woman?" said the commissary, and out came his pencil to add this point to the *procès-verbal.* "Do you know her? Could you identify her?" Then, as Ivan only stared at him vacantly, "The woman who stabbed you," he explained. "Try and remember. We found you lying in the entry badly wounded. Do you know who stabbed you?"

But the wounded man turned his head away and moaned impatiently. At a sign from the doctor the commissary collapsed.

"He is too weak; he has lost a deal of blood. I must go down to the sisters and get some one to come up and attend to him," said the medical man.

"Sœur Marguerite," Ivan said, with an effort; "tell Sœur Marguerite to come to me."

Everybody at La Villette knew that Sœur Marguerite was away at the trial.

"I will ask for Sœur Marguerite," replied the doctor; "but she may not be in the way; I must take whoever is."

"No, no; Sœur Marguerite," Ivan insisted. "If she is still in the court, send and say I want to see her; I have something to say, and there is no time to lose. Be quick!"

The commissary, guessing that the something was connected with this attempt on his life, hurried out and called a cab, and drove to the court, where, as we know, he found Marguerite, and took her back with him. The errand had been done with great haste, but Ivan's feverish impatience had found the time never-ending.

"Ah! you are come—thank God!" he exclaimed, the moment she appeared. "Get a pencil, and write what I am going to tell you."

"But you are too weak; I had better wait," she urged, gently.

"No, no; there is no time. I have strength enough, if only there be time. Write."

Marguerite drew her big pocket-book from her sleeve, and held her pencil ready.

"You remember that All-souls Eve at Yrakow?" Ivan began. "My sister Sophie was coming through the wood in the afternoon. She met Larchoff. He stopped her, and—" A spasm passed over Ivan's face; he struggled for a moment with some violent pain or emotion, and having mastered it, went on: "She escaped from him.... I saw her flying across the road toward our gate; she was half mad.... I went straight

into the sacristy, and took Father Christopher's gun .... I knew where he kept it, and I knew it was loaded .... I hurried back to the forest, and overtook Larchoff, and shot him."

Marguerite uttered a cry, and dropped the pencil; she picked it up, and Ivan continued:

"As God hears me, my first thought was for Sophie. I wanted to screen her; if it was known I had killed Larchoff, it would have led to suspicion .... After I fired the shot, Father Christopher passed; he was hurrying through the wood to get back to the confessional; I thought he might have seen me, and if he had, I knew he would suspect me. I went on to the sacristy, and put back the gun where I had found it. And then—oh, my God, how shall I tell it!—then I went into the chapel, and knelt down in the confessional and confessed the murder. Then I was safe. I knew that this sealed his lips—that he must let himself be put to death rather than utter a word that might incriminate me, and betray the secret of the confessional .... The next day I went into X—— and denounced him as the murderer."

Marguerite could bear no more; she burst into tears, overcome with horror and compassion.

"Ah! I have suffered for my crime!" Ivan went on; "ay, the torments of the damned .... It so chanced—God in His judgment so decreed—that I was passing when the police were carrying him away .... I saw him driven on between the two policemen. Oh, my God! my God! the look he gave me!... it has haunted me like a dead man's eye.... I felt sure at first that the Prince would have obtained his release; when that failed, I did what I could .... I spent my whole fortune trying to purchase his escape, to bribe the jailers, trying to get alleviations for him. I have lived in poverty....

my life has been a hell of remorse.... And now I am dying accursed and unforgiven, murdered myself.... It is just! it is just!"

Marguerite dropped on her knees, shaken to her soul with pity for the miserable man who had sinned and suffered so terribly. But her strong sense and habit of self-restraint quickly brought her back to the practical question of how to make this confession available for Father Christopher. She had presence of mind enough to remember that either it must be made verbally before another witness, or Ivan must sign what she had written in presence of a witness.

"Is it any good my confessing now?" said Ivan, as if he guessed what was in her mind. "Will it help to set Father Christopher free, do you think? If it did, if I knew that before I died, it would make hell less horrible to me."

"I have not a doubt," replied Marguerite, "but that as soon as your statement is known to the authorities, they will liberate him at once; but you will have to repeat the confession, or else sign it in the presence of another person. May I send for the commissary?"

"Yes, yes; send for as many as will come. I will swear before the whole world that I committed the murder, and confessed it to Father Christopher."

Marguerite went out, intending to send for the commissary. She found him in the entry, surrounded by the curé, the doctor, several police-officers, and others who had been attracted by the news of the murder. She told rapidly what had happened, and when the commissary, accompanied by the curé and the doctor, came in, Marguerite read aloud what she had written, and then asked Ivan if it was correct, and if he would swear to the truth of the story.

"Yes, I swear, as a dying man, that what you have written is true. So help me God! Get me up that I may sign it."

They lifted him, and put the pen in his hand, and he wrote his name; the others then added their signatures. The commissary was putting away the pen, when Ivan made a sign that he wanted it again. They gave it to him, and he clutched it fondly. It was Narka's pen. He remembered seeing it on her little writing-table.

"What have they done to her?" he asked—"to Narka Larik; what is the sentence?"

"She is acquitted on all points," replied the commissary, who had heard it from a police-officer just come from the court.

"Thank God!" muttered Ivan, and his face brightened; then, changing suddenly, a look of hungry, wolfish hate came over it. "Now let them catch Schenk," he said. "It was Schenk's doing—it was Schenk that stabbed me. I would die easy if I knew they would hang him!"

He fell back exhausted on the pillow.

## CHAPTER XLI.

THE verdict of acquittal was received with loud and general applause, the Villette element making itself conspicuous in the chorus by yells of triumph, which might have easily been mistaken for howls of rage. When M. de Beaucrillon and Sibyl led Narka out of the court, half fainting, she hardly knew where she was going, and allowed herself to be assisted into the carriage without asking where they were taking her. It was only when she found herself before the steps of Sibyl's house that she realized where she was. It was then too late to protest, even if she had had strength to do it.

Sibyl took her upstairs, and put her to bed; she was kind and tender as a sister; and Narka, worn out in mind and body, submitted unresistingly to the soft ministrations. She was thankful to be at rest. She slept through the night from sheer exhaustion. Sibyl would have her lie in bed next morning; she forbade her to get up till the afternoon, and gave orders that Mlle. Narka was not to be disturbed, even if Sœur Marguerite came.

Immediately after the second breakfast Sibyl went out with Gaston. They were both anxious to see Marguerite, and learn the cause of her mysterious summons from court the day before. The moment they were gone, Narka rose and dressed herself, and slipped down to the boudoir. She could not lie quiet in bed, when Basil might arrive at any moment and call for her. She had not been long in the boudoir when a carriage drove

into the court. It might be Basil! Narka started up and went to the window. A coupé was drawn up before the steps; the hall porter was parleying with some one inside. Presently he opened the carriage door and assisted a lady to alight. Narka recognized Marie Krinsky. The thought of meeting this girl, who loved Basil, who had been her rival, would have been intolerable; but it did not occur to her that Marie was coming upstairs: she was, no doubt, going to wait in the drawing-room, or perhaps to write a note in the library. It was only when the sound of silk rustling on the landing became audible that Narka knew the young Princess was going to appear. She glanced round for a way of escape. There was a panelled door that opened into a tiny closet, a sort of *débarras* where the tea-table, etc., were kept. There was just time to spring across the room and open this door and draw it after her, without daring to shut it, when Marie entered.

"You will find everything here, Princess," said the servant, and soon the click of an opened inkstand, and then the noise of a pen scratching the paper, announced that Marie was writing.

The time seemed long to Narka, but in reality ten minutes had not elapsed when Marie started up, exclaiming: "Sœur Marguerite! I am so glad! I was writing a line for Madame de Beaucrillon. We only returned from Fontainebleau last night. You were at the trial; tell me about it. Was Narka Larik guilty? Did she conspire against the life of the Emperor?"

Marguerite lifted her eyebrows. "Why, did you not read the trial? It is all in this morning's newspapers. She was completely acquitted."

"Oh, I know that. M. de Beaucrillon is rich enough to buy up the jury. And he was quite right to do it;

but is she guilty? Is she the dreadful woman they say? I so want to know the truth." She spoke earnestly, nervously.

"Narka is no more guilty than I am," said Marguerite, with the warmth of conviction. "She is a noble woman, and she has suffered cruelly."

"Ah! But now they say— Is it true, this story of Prince Basil's being in love with her and wanting to marry her?"

"Yes, it is quite true."

Marie grew pale, and Marguerite saw that the words had cut into her like a knife. Poor child! So she was to be a victim, through no fault of her own. She looked as if a touch would have overthrown her courage; but she struggled bravely, and kept up.

"I am glad she is good, since he is going to marry her," she said; "it would have been dreadful for Madame de Beaucrillon; and I should have been sorry for her brother, who—"

Marie stopped short, blushed violently, and then grew white, and an expression between terror and defiance came into her eyes. Marguerite turned to see what had wrought the sudden change, and saw a gentleman advancing quickly toward the open door of the boudoir; he was unkempt and travel-stained, like one come off a journey; but Marguerite recognized Basil at a glance. He went straight up to her, and took her hand and raised it to his lips; he did not say a word, but his face, his whole manner, were eloquent with feeling. Suddenly, as if he had not noticed the presence of the young Princess, he made her a low bow. Marie took up her parasol.

"I am not sending you away, I hope, Princess," said Basil.

"No; I was going." She shook hands with Margue-

rite, and then, looking Basil steadily in the face, "I am glad to be one of the first to congratulate you on your approaching marriage, Prince," she said. He read insolent contempt in her glance; but it was the defiance of desperation.

"Thank you, Princess," he replied, and held back the portière with an ostentatious pretence of making wider room for her exit.

The girl's retreating footsteps made no sound on the soft carpet, and Narka did not know she had left the room when Basil spoke:

"Sibyl is out?"

"Yes; I believe she is gone to La Villette," Marguerite replied, and she laid on the table a parcel that she took out of a basket on her arm. There was nothing so far to inform Narka that Marie was not still present. Marguerite looked tired, and Basil thought agitated; she sat down and with a certain hesitation in her manner, "A dreadful thing has happened," she said; "Ivan Gorff was stabbed yesterday during the trial."

"Good God! Ivan! By whom?"

"By a man named Schenk."

"Schenk!" Basil repeated, aghast. "My God! And is Ivan dead?"

"He is dying. He sent for me to make a confession —a terrible confession." Narka held her breath, while Marguerite paused, as if the words were hard to speak. Then, almost in a whisper, "*It was Ivan who murdered Larchoff!*"

Basil's vehement exclamation covered another sound that came at the same moment from the wall behind him. He dropped into a chair, too stunned to utter a word. Narka felt sure they were alone now; but she also was too stunned to speak or move; her heart gave

a great leap, and then sank; she felt sick and faint, but she remained motionless, rooted to the ground.

"Marguerite," Basil said, "if you knew what this revelation is to me!"

"I do know," she answered, in a low voice, and her lids fell.

Basil stood up. "You suspected me of the murder?"

"I thought you had done it accidentally."

"And you kept my secret! Marguerite!—Marguerite!"

Before she could start up or prevent him, he had fallen down before her, and was sobbing with his head upon her knees. Marguerite was too frightened by the suddenness of the action and by the violence of his emotion to know what to do; but Basil mastered the paroxysm quickly, and stood up, and then sat down beside her.

Narka had by this time regained her self-possession, but she had no longer the courage to come out of her hiding-place. She had first listened involuntarily to the dialogue, and now she could not show herself; it was too late. She heard Basil sobbing, and she guessed, more by instinct than by sound, that he had fallen down at Marguerite's feet; if her life had depended on it, she could not have pushed open the door and looked at him there.

"Yes," he went on, after a moment's silence, "I thought I had shot him; but I was not certain. When Father Christopher was arrested I knew it was too late to accuse myself; the police had fastened the crime on him. The only thing I could do was to go to St. Petersburg and sue for his release. I came away, believing he was to be set free the next day. Did Ivan tell you why he murdered Larchoff?"

"Yes; he confessed everything. It was a terrible story." And she repeated it as Ivan had told it.

"My God! how horrible!" Basil rose and walked the length of the room; then he sat down near Marguerite again, and speaking deliberately, but like a man who was constrained to give utterance to something that would not be held back, "I too have a confession to make," he said: "that murder changed my whole destiny—perhaps. I had set my heart on making you my wife. There was an end of that hope the moment I felt there was blood upon my hands; but I loved you as I have never loved any other woman."

Both were too absorbed to notice the dull sound of something falling heavily to the ground close by.

"Oh, Basil! and Narka?" Marguerite said, in a tone of pained reproach. "You love Narka?"

"Yes, I love Narka, and I will do my best to make her happy. I will be a good husband to her; she shall miss nothing; but my love for you was a unique thing in my life."

The moment was too solemn, Basil himself was too free from self-consciousness, for the strange avowal to make Marguerite feel shy, to cause her any embarrassment. It was a startling confession for her to listen to; but it told her nothing she had not known before. She knew perfectly well that night at Yrakow that the course of her destiny was suddenly changed. It was all like a dream. She looked back to the dream now, and saw spread out before her, like a landscape seen in a looking-glass, the life that might have been a panorama of golden days crowned with honors and delights; but the vision stirred no shadow of regret in her heart, nor did it move her will to a momentary recoil from the part that she had chosen. Far from it. She rejoiced that her present lot was beyond the reach of change. With an almost involuntary movement she

felt for her crucifix, and closed her hand upon it, silently renewing her self-consecration.

Basil too had been carried back to the past, but not with the same glad assent in its renunciations. "My God!" he cried, with a sudden burst of passionate feeling, "it is as if a reprieve had suddenly come to me, after being under sentence of condemnation all these years!"

"Thank God!" Marguerite exclaimed, fervently. "And now you will give up once and forever these wild and wicked theories that have led you and Narka into such trouble? God has been very good to you, and you owe Him a return. You have now an opportunity of redeeming the past; you must begin from this out to lead a noble and useful life; you must break off with conspiracy and revolution, and work for your country in wiser and better ways. Promise me that you will."

Basil fell back and thrust his hands into his pockets. "If I had only myself to think of," he said, after a pause; "but I have contracted engagements that it would not be honorable to break; it would be cowardly to abandon those who are risking, and who will go on to the bitter end risking, their lives for the sake of overthrowing tyrants."

"That is just nonsense—rank nonsense!" protested Marguerite, with her old impulsive manner. "They will never overthrow anybody but themselves. I know them well—a set of hot-headed fools and fanatics! I see them every day, and I hear the wild nonsense they talk. But what is excusable in many of them is downright criminal in you; and your example would give many of them the courage and the excuse to give up the whole thing—be sure of that. There are very few in Russia, I dare say, as in France, who after a while do not see the madness of the work they have embarked in, and

who would not gladly get out of it if they could. Besides, you are not worth so much to them; you will never go far enough to do the work they want; you think that talking and writing and stirring up passionate desires for liberty is doing a grand thing; but they want it to lead to action, that is, to assassination, to wholesale murder. You will never lend your hand to that; you will only go far enough to ruin yourself, without satisfying them. Give it all up. Oh, Basil! for Heaven's sake give it up, and begin to lead an honorable, useful life. Narka will make it a happy life for you. She will be as noble and loyal and loving a wife as any man was ever blest with. Think, too, of all that she has suffered for your sake! All but death. Yes, that time in the fortress was worse than death. Make it up to her now, and guard her, at any rate in the future, from those horrors that she has gone through in the past. She was very near falling into the hands of the torturers again. It was almost a miracle that she escaped being given over to the Russian authorities. A man whom we had helped in trouble waylaid the policeman and rescued this," Marguerite continued, taking the casket from the table.

"Do you know what is in it?" Basil asked, as he took it in his hand and tore off the paper that covered it.

"The papers you gave her to keep, and those revolutionary articles of yours that Ivan Gorff gave her to translate."

"Good heavens!" Basil exclaimed, greatly excited. The sight of that ivory box brought back his boyhood to him; he remembered the morning he gave it to Narka full of sweetmeats for her birthday; he kept turning it round and examining it to conceal his emotion. "My poor Narka!" he murmured.

"You will make it all up to her now; promise me you will?" Marguerite pleaded. "You will give up conspiracy?"

Basil did not answer. He was moved to his centre, but his will was torn in opposite directions—pity and tenderness for Narka drew him one way; what he called honor drew him another.

"Basil," Marguerite said, and the blood mounted to her cheek, and her voice trembled, "you say that you cared for me once; for the sake of that old affection, to prove to me that it was something deeper and better than a passing fancy, promise me what I ask you. I ask it in the name of God, of your mother, of all that you ever held sacred!" Her voice broke a little, and her eyes were full of tears.

Still Basil hesitated, but it was only because he was struggling with the emotion that choked him. "I promise you," he answered.

After a pause Marguerite said, "Now all our prayer must be that the reprieve may reach Father Christopher in time."

She staid on a few minutes, asking questions about the distance to Irkoutsk, calculating the chances and perils that must be reckoned with on the way homeward. Then she rose to go.

"You won't wait to see Narka?" Basil said.

"No; she is perhaps asleep, or at any rate she is resting. You will tell her about Ivan; his confession will be an immense relief to her; but the rest will be a great shock. She will be horrified too to hear about Schenk."

Basil accompanied Marguerite down-stairs. In the hall he said: "I wonder would they let me see Ivan? Could you get me into the prison? I should like to see him once."

"Oh yes, do go and see him; I am sure it will be a consolation to the poor fellow. Go to-morrow morning and ask for Sœur Jeanne; or, stay, if you go there now you will find her. Say that you have a message to her from Sœur Marguerite, and the porter will let you in."

"I will go at once," said Basil; "and by the time I get back Narka will probably be up, and able to see me." He stood and watched Marguerite till she crossed the court and disappeared. Then he went out and called a cab, and drove to the prison.

As Marguerite walked rapidly homeward she felt nearer to perfect happiness than she had ever done before in her innocent, happy life. The windows of the world seemed to have been suddenly thrown wide open, and fresh air from heaven let in to blow about her face. Her heart was so merry that she could have sung for gladness. All the wrong things were coming right. If only La Villette would cast out its heart of rage! Marguerite kept her hand upon that angry heart as a sick-nurse feels the pulse of a patient; *le pauvre peuple* was her sick child; she kept feeling its pulse, and the quick irregular beats made her anxious; there was fever still in the hot blood, the incoherent ravings of delirium were still audible in resentful mutterings. The demon was not yet exorcised. Vengeance and hate possessed the people, and desperate longings to set free the rioters who were in prison, and wild, dark schemes to do it at any cost of life to those who, not being with them, were against them.

"If only I might die for them!" she murmured in her heart, with a sinking of despair. But then she thought of Father Christopher, and of Basil and Narka, and how all the wrong things were coming right at last, and she trusted and rejoiced.

## CHAPTER XLII.

Narka lay motionless, crouching in a heap on the ground, for some minutes after Basil and Marguerite had left the room. At last the silence assured her that they had gone. She rose to her knees and dragged herself up, and opened the door cautiously; there were the two chairs that Marguerite and Basil had been sitting in; they seemed to hold them still; the atmosphere of the place was suffocating. Narka felt she must get out of it to breathe; she made her way up to her own room, and sat down and tried to think what had happened since she had left it, only an hour ago. The whole world was changed to her, and yet in reality those words of Basil's which had flung her down as if stricken with paralysis had told her nothing new; she was conscious of having known all along that in those early days at Yrakow he had been in love with Marguerite, and on the night of the murder Marguerite had betrayed the secret of her love for him. But then had come the warrant and the ransom, and his declaration to herself; and what waves of passionate love and trust had swept over their lives since then, obliterating the very trace of those early jealousies and uncertainties!

Narka was not so simple as to suppose that a man's love was not to be trusted because the virgin vintage of his heart had been thrown into the wine-press for another woman's feet to tread. She would not have felt a pang of jealousy or resentment if Basil had himself confessed to her that he had loved Marguerite first; but

that he should never have said a word to her, and should now confess it to Marguerite—this stung her to the quick, and struck at the root of all belief in his love.

"If he loved me," she repeated to herself, "he would have been compelled by the very force of his love to tell me; he could not have kept it a secret."

And she was right. For though we may sometimes wholly trust where we do not love, we can never wholly love where we do not trust. Basil, then, did not love her; not as she understood love, not as a man should love the woman he is going to marry. And if he did not love her, should she keep him to his engagement? Could she let him sacrifice himself to her from a sense of honor, of pity, of gratitude?

Schenk was right: Basil had never loved her.

Narka interlaced her fingers, and straightened up her arms above her head in a gesture of intolerable anguish. "I will give him up!—I will give him up!" she cried aloud, almost in a shout, and then she flung herself upon the sofa, and sobbed till it shook under her. When the paroxysm had subsided she stood up, and began to walk up and down the room. "If he were to confess the truth to me even now, I would believe him," she said, again speaking aloud to herself, and like a drowning man catching at a straw in her despair; "if he were to come to me now and say: 'I loved Marguerite in the old days before I learned to love you,' I could believe—" But she suddenly checked herself. Had he not told Marguerite that his love for her was a unique thing in his life? And then he had said that Narka should miss nothing, that he would be a loyal and loving husband to her, that he would pay back his debt as a man of honor. Oh God! was this the return she was to get for her passionate love! Could she take such pitiful pay-

ment of cold gratitude and duty in exchange for the love that had been burning like a fire in her heart all these years? No; it was intolerable. "I will give him up!" she repeated, already with a stern quietness that bespoke a firmer will than her first violent outburst.

She sat down and tried to face the reality. She would give him up; this much was certain; she was resolved to give him up. And having made this tremendous decision, it seemed as if the necessity for it grew suddenly clearer. She saw distinctly, like something new that she had never even glanced at before, what the consequences would be to Basil and to herself if he married her: he was going to make as complete a sacrifice as a man could make for a woman; he was going to quarrel with his father; to give him up; to give up his whole fortune and position; to give up Sibyl too, for though she might feign to forgive the marriage, in her heart she would never really forgive it; she would hate the woman who had come between her and the brother of whom she was so proud. And what had Narka to give him in return for all this? If he had loved her—ah, if he had loved her! Narka knew with what supreme abundance love can satisfy the lover, and make all sacrifices as nothing compared to the plenary bliss it can bestow. But he did not love her.

"I will not marry him; I will not see him again," she said; and her will took firmer hold of this determination, and it seemed to harden her heart and brace it for the sacrifice. Then, instinctively, her thoughts flew to Marguerite. There would be sympathy there and understanding. "I will tell her the truth; I will tell her everything," was Narka's reflection. But when she had told Marguerite, what was she to do? Where was she to go? She must take up life again with its dif-

ficulties and its inexorable necessities; she must go back to loneliness, without any sustaining hope to make it endurable. Suddenly she remembered Zampa, and the thought was like a flash of lightning showing her a way out of the darkness. She would go to Zampa; she would throw herself into the art she loved, and enter at once on her career as a singer, and study with all her might, and become a great artist. A thrill of relief, almost of exultation, came with this resolution, and with the consciousness that she had within her the power to fashion her own destiny and conquer independence. She need not be an object of pity to any one; there was something in this. Narka stood up again, and as she did so there was a knock at the door. One of the maids, of course. She said, "Come in." The door opened, and it was Basil who entered.

He went quickly up to her and took her in his arms.

"My Narka!" he cried, straining her to him.

She suffered his embrace without responding to it; but Basil was too excited to notice this, and he felt that she was trembling.

"I was here before," he said, "but you were resting. How are you, dearest? Let me look at you? You are tired and pale. No wonder." He kissed her forehead. "Sit down beside me;" and he would have drawn her to the couch, but Narka did not move.

"Tell me about Ivan," she said. "Have you seen him? Is he dead?"

"No; he is still alive; but they don't think he will pass the day."

Basil now became conscious of something strange about her. It was natural that the horror of this tragedy should have solemnized all things to them both, that it should be uppermost in her thoughts, and have

checked the overflow of her joy a little; but there was something beyond this in her manner. He tried again to draw her to the couch, but her figure stiffened itself against his arm, and she laid her hand upon his shoulder, as if gently putting him from her.

"What is the matter, Narka? Are you not glad to see me?" he asked.

"I have something to say to you," she said, and her great eyes looked steadily into his, and her voice did not falter. "There is an end of our engagement. You must leave me, and forget that you ever thought of marrying me."

Basil drew away his arm, and looked at her in amaze. "You are gone mad," he said. Then, in a softer tone: "No wonder if you did, after all you have been going through, my poor Narka. But what has put this folly into your head?"

"It is no folly. The folly was when we thought that our marriage could bring either of us anything but suffering and regret. Yes. Let me speak out, Basil. Listen to me. If you married me, you would lose everything; you would be an exile all your life; your father would never forgive you, nor Sibyl; and Sibyl would hate me; and I could not live under that; it would kill me. I see it all now. We must part. You will marry some one who will suit you and make you happy; some one in your own rank. Marie Krinsky loves you; marry her, and give up playing at patriotism; you are not made for it. No, dear Basil, you are made to be what you are, and nothing else. If you broke with your kindred and your caste and married me, we should both regret it. You would try to hide it from me, but I should see it, and it would make me a miserable woman."

She said all this rapidly, as if she were in a hurry to get it all out before breaking down; but her voice did not break, although it was nervous and vibrating, and she was so white that Basil feared she was going to faint; but her eyes still met his without quailing. What did it all mean? What had she heard to drive her to this extraordinary resolution? His conscience smote him; he remembered his words to Marguerite in the boudoir; but they could not have come back to Narka.

"Sibyl has been talking to you," he said; "she has persuaded you to this."

"No, she has not; I have not had a moment's conversation with Sibyl since I have been in the house. She has had nothing whatever to do with my determination."

"Then what in Heaven's name has come to you, Narka? Have you ceased to care for me? It was only yesterday you swore to me you loved me as your life, and now you coolly turn me away, and throw me off without a word of explanation. I insist upon knowing what it means."

"I have told you," she replied. "We have been living in a fools' paradise. I was blind, and you were mad. But there is an end of it. We must separate. Don't be sorry for me, or afraid. I have courage; I will go my way safely."

"Good God! what are you talking about? What way will you go if you do not come with me?"

"I will go to Florence, and become a singer. My voice is better than ever it was. I am able to face the future without any fear."

She was still as white as marble. There was something marble-like about her altogether in the calm stone coldness of her manner to him. It was unnatural, incomprehensible, in so passionate a creature as Narka.

"You are talking mere nonsense, child," said Basil; "and besides, you forget that I have a claim on you that is not to be set aside by any fanciful arguments or caprice of feeling: I am your debtor for fifty thousand roubles."

"Not quite. You sent me some of it by poor Ivan; but Sibyl has paid me the whole amount. It is there," said Narka, pointing to the drawer of the writing-table. "I found it when I came here from the court yesterday."

"Sibyl had no right to meddle in it," he said, reddening with anger. He would rather have remained Narka's debtor than become Sibyl's, and it seemed to weaken his hold on Narka now that the debt should have been paid; though, if she persisted in breaking their engagement, it was better he should be free. Would she persist? Basil said to himself that she would not; but there was something about Narka that said to him, "She will." If anything had happened a month ago to break off his engagement honorably to himself, it is doubtful whether he would have felt the blow a very severe one; but coming from Narka's hand, and dealt at him in this cool, sudden way, it wounded him to the quick, and fired his feeling toward her to a flame of passion. He would not give her up! He knew how she loved him, and how she had suffered for him. This act of hers was the result of some heroic fancy, or else she had been stung to it by wounded pride. In spite of her denial, he suspected Sibyl was at the bottom of it; but he would conquer her in spite of her own stubborn pride, and Sibyl, and the whole world; but there was no use in struggling any more with Narka now: opposition would only nerve her to more determined resistance.

"Narka, you are very cruel to play with me in this

way," he said, "and I shall punish you for it some day. But you are tired and nervous, and you want rest after all this terrible strain on you. I wish you could go to the country for a week. Perhaps if you went down to Beaucrillon for a few days, it would do you good and bring you to your right mind."

"Perhaps," she said, looking at him with a smile that went to his heart's core: there was an expression in her eyes that was indefinable.

Basil drew her to him, and held her to his breast, kissing her with a passionate, hungry tenderness. "You sha'n't fly from me," he murmured between the kisses; "I would follow you to the end of the world if you did. My love! my wife! my beautiful one!"

Narka let herself sink into the loved embrace. Now for the first time she was tasting the caresses of a true lover. Basil felt her clinging to him, and triumphed in his power over her, and silently rejoiced.

A knock at the door made him start and release her.

"Monsieur de Beaucrillon desires to know if mademoiselle will come down-stairs or receive him here?" said the servant.

"I will come down presently," Narka replied. But when the man was gone, she said to Basil: "I must be alone for a while. I cannot see any one. Don't let him come up."

"I will protect you," Basil said; and he kissed her again, and went away.

Narka waited till the sound of his footfalls on the stairs had quite ceased, and then she flung herself on her knees, and her tortured heart found relief in a flood of passionate tears, while her soul went up in a piercing prayer for pity and help. But it was not in her nature to indulge long in the luxury of grief, and to

keep action waiting on emotion. She rose and dried her eyes, and considered what she had to do. The vital crisis had come and gone. She was glad to have seen Basil. That last caress had satisfied an intolerable craving of her heart, and given her courage for what remained to be done. Her last fears were now cast out; she felt armed against every attack from within and from without. She would have risen and gone away that moment, but for the fear of meeting Basil or M. de Beaucrillon. Besides, she must write a farewell note to Sibyl, explaining her flight. This done, she put on her cloak and bonnet, and waited. After a while the bell clanged, the gates were opened, and Sibyl's open carriage came wheeling into the court. Soon Narka heard a light step on the stairs, and there was a knock at the door, then a pause, and she heard the step descending. At the end of about half an hour there was a sound of wheels moving away. Narka, from a safe distance, looked through the lace curtains, and saw Sibyl and M. de Beaucrillon and Basil all driving off together. Basil had kept his promise of protecting her. She was free now to go. But instead of hurrying away, she sat down. It was not that her purpose faltered; she felt very strong and resolute, but extraordinarily *exaltée.* A strange sensation came over her, something like what she had experienced in the prison; it was as if she had been lifted out of the world, beyond time, and was looking back on all she had left behind, on the broken destiny she was running away from, as one looks back from a turn in the road at the house one has just left; but the mystery of life seemed suddenly illuminated with an altogether different meaning and purpose from what she had seen, or fancied, in that other vision; the dark and cruel things were now bright with hidden possibilities

of blessing and redemption; she saw Marguerite's ideal emerge in all its beauty amidst the storm and confusion of the world around it; and side by side with this she saw her own ideal overturned and dishonored; the things that she had worshipped had betrayed her; the love whose incantation had transfigured her whole life had melted away like a shadow, and with it all her illusions had vanished; the insane theories, the wild enthusiasms, which had inspired and misled her, had suddenly evaporated with the great passion that had fed her belief in them. Only a little while ago the defeat of those hopes and dreams would have seemed the bitterest of life's revenges; but now she was content to let them go. And was everything gone? Was there nothing saved from the wreck? Yes; there was God and her fellow-creatures; there was all humanity to care for. She would open her heart to this larger love, and put her hand to whatsoever service of help came to it. In this supreme moment of her sacrifice Narka was beginning to taste something of the inebriation that comes to those who drink of the bitter cup with courage.

But it was time to be going. She rose quickly, and went down-stairs. It seemed only yesterday that she had walked up those crimson steps to be greeted by Sibyl in the boudoir where a few hours ago she had heard the sentence that banished her. There was a servant in the hall; she passed him by, and went out into the garden to a gate that opened into the street. Narka knew the trick of the latch; she lifted it, let herself out, and then drew the gate that locked itself behind her.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

It is now winter again at Yrakow. Sibyl and her husband and Basil are once more assembled in that tapestried room where we first saw them. Father Christopher is there too, aged and broken, his figure, formerly so erect, is now bent, and he walks like a man who is still carrying a load on his shoulders and dragging a chain; but this he declares is only a bad habit that his old limbs cannot get rid of; he says he is the happiest of men; and indeed the serenity of his countenance and his cheerful flow of spirits confirm this assertion.

Basil was engaged to Marie Krinsky, and the marriage was soon to be celebrated at the Winter Palace with all pomp becoming the presence of royalty and the rank of the bride and bridegroom.

Sibyl ought to have been satisfied. And yet the old castle was empty of something that she missed at every turn. She was grateful to Narka for having gone of her own free-will and set Basil free; but her absence made a void that nothing could fill. By tacit consent, the brother and sister never spoke of Narka; but each knew that she was dearer than ever to the other since they had lost her.

This evening M. de Beaucrillon was reading aloud the newspaper, when he came to a paragraph headed, "*Milan.—Extraordinary Scene at La Scala,*" and having read so far, stopped suddenly.

Sibyl looked up from her embroidery frame. "What is it?" she said.

He hesitated a moment, and then, with a movement that seemed to say, "Why not?" read on: "'Last night Mademoiselle Narka Larik made her *début* in *Norma*, and no one who witnessed the performance will ever forget the scene. Her extraordinary beauty would alone have insured her a success, but this, joined to her incomparable voice and transcendent talent, won for her such a triumph as no one present ever saw on any stage. The audience simply went mad with enthusiasm. The King of X——, who was present with the Queen, rushed on the stage and conducted the beautiful artist, who was almost overcome with emotion, to the royal box, where the Queen embraced her, and drawing a costly diamond ring from her own finger, placed it on Mademoiselle Narka's. Cries of "*Evviva la Regina!*" "*Evviva la Narka!*" showed how the spectators rejoiced in this meeting of the two royalties of genius and rank. The prima donna is invited to a dinner given in her honor by their Majesties on the 20th instant.'"

A moment of intense silence followed the reading of this passage. Then M. de Beaucrillon laid down the newspaper and said: "She is a noble woman. I hope some Crown Prince will fall in love with her and marry her!"

THE END.

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